



# ROAD SKETCHES IN BYGONE DAYS



# OLD COACHING DAYS

BY

STANLEY HARRIS

(‘AN OLD STAGER’)

*ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN STURGESS*



LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET

*Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen*

1882





*DEDICATED*

*BY PERMISSION*

*TO*

*THE ROAD CLUB*



## PREFACE.

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It was not until some of the chapters in this book had from time to time appeared as articles in 'Land and Water,' that it was suggested to me by a gentleman well versed in coaching matters that I should write a book on the subject. Acting upon his suggestion, I have since collected from various sources a considerable amount of information touching the mode of travelling before the introduction of railways, and I believe there will be found in these pages much that will interest and amuse those who are too young to have known the road in its palmy days, while the perusal of them may bring back to the memory of older men pleasing reminiscences of days long past—

*Hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*

What I may call a history of road travelling and the various circumstances related, as also the time-bills and figures occurring in many parts of the

book, may be relied on as being correct, having been taken from authentic, reliable, and original sources, some of which I may venture to state are not in possession of anyone beside myself.

I have endeavoured, and I hope not in vain, to collect and place on record descriptions of road travelling which, ere many more years have passed, will only be procurable from written sources.

STANLEY HARRIS.

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CHAPTER I.

LONDON INNS IN COACHING DAYS



## CHAPTER I.

IN the days of coaching there were some few inns in London with coaching yards and stabling attached to them. They were not the hotels of the present day, belonging to limited companies, but the real *bond fide* good old inns, the resorts of the *bond fide* travellers, and, with all their peculiarities, specialities, and, I may add, comforts, are not now to be found, having gradually passed away with the necessities which existed for them in coaching days, but ceased when all travelling was eventually transferred from the road to the rail.

The principal coaching inns in London were:—

The ‘Bull and Mouth,’ St. Martin’s-le-Grand, belonging to the large coach proprietor Sherman.

‘Belle Sauvage,’ Ludgate Hill, Robert Nelson’s.

‘Swan with Two Necks,’ Lad Lane; ‘Spread Eagle,’ Gracechurch Street; and ‘White Horse,’ Fetter Lane, all belonging to Chaplin.

‘The Blossoms Inn,’ Lawrence Lane, Cheapside, Gilbert’s.

‘ Bolt-in-Tun,’ Fleet Street, Gray’s.

‘ Cross Keys,’ Wood Street, Cheapside; and  
‘ Golden Cross,’ Charing Cross; and ‘ George and  
Blue Boar,’ Holborn, Horne’s.

‘ The Bell and Crown,’ Holborn, Fagg’s.

‘ Bull Inn,’ Aldgate, Ann Nelson’s.

‘ Three Nuns,’ Aldgate, Israel Alexander’s.

‘ Saracen’s Head,’ Snow Hill, Mountain’s.

And ‘ King’s Arms,’ Snow Hill, Hearn’s.

All these necessarily had stabling for the horses bringing in the coaches late at night, and taking them out early in the morning. Stabling had also to be provided for all the night coaches and mail horses, which remained in London all day. The coaching inns were accordingly well filled by the coach passengers, and, as a necessary consequence, when the coaches stopped and the passengers resorted to the rail, they went to the hotel nearest to the railway stations, just as they had previously gone to the inns at which the coaches stopped.

The difference between the days of the road and the rail is perhaps more striking in the mail department than in any other. The whole of the newspapers and letters from London to all parts of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland were then carried in the hind boots and on the roofs of some twenty-seven mail coaches; but then the penny post had not been established, or penny daily

papers either. The only London daily newspapers were, the 'Times,' 'Morning Herald,' 'Morning Post,' and 'Morning Chronicle,' all at sixpence each, and something considerable for postage, though I don't know exactly what the rate was.

All the mails left London at the same hour at night, namely, eight o'clock (except two or three day mails), and arrived at the General Post Office at nearly the same time in the morning; but the mails for the western parts of England all stopped at some West End booking-offices to take up passengers and luggage. The West End offices for those going down the Uxbridge Road being the 'Green Man and Still,' and 'Gloucester Coffee House,' in Oxford Street; while the offices for those going through Hounslow were the 'White Bear,' Piccadilly, the 'Spread Eagle,' 'Bull and Mouth,' and 'Golden Cross,' in Piccadilly Circus, being the offices of Chaplin, Sherman, and Horne.

Some of the London proprietors confined their business almost exclusively to one district; thus Sherman's coaches were nearly all on the northern roads, as were also the mails he horsed, except the Exeter and Worcester. He had more than nine coaches on the Birmingham road, and four northern mails. Mountain's coaches were nearly all on the northern roads, while Mrs. Nelson's, from the 'Bull

Inn,' Aldgate, were on the eastern ; Fagg's, from the ' Bell and Crown,' on the western ; but Chaplin, with his three separate establishments, went north, south, east, and west. I should not omit to mention Hatchett's, the great rendezvous of coaches in the present day, and also celebrated in the olden times for the number of coaches and mails that stopped there, as also at the ' Gloucester Coffee House,' Piccadilly, now rebuilt and converted into a hotel. There was also the old ' White Horse Cellar,' opposite from which the splendid renowned ' Quicksilver ' mail started, but the not less renowned ' Tantivy ' started from Hatchett's. All the coaches travelling on the western roads started from the various inns I have mentioned ; but for the convenience of West End passengers travelling east or north, pair-horse coaches were sent up from the city offices to fetch them and parcels down into the city.

From five in the morning till eight or nine was a right busy and bustling time in all the coach inn yards, with mails and night-coaches arriving with all their luggage, passengers and parcels, and day-coaches loading and going out.

After that time, when the parcels had been sent out in the carts for delivery, coaching was tolerably quiet—that is, so far as the long coaches were concerned, as their times were generally so arranged

that they reached London early in the morning or in the evening. Day-coaches for short distances, such as Brighton and Cambridge, arrived and departed at all hours in the day.

After three o'clock in the afternoon the long coaching business revived again, and those for Liverpool, Exeter, &c., might be seen starting, while about seven o'clock the business of loading and getting all the mails off from the various yards had to be transacted.

Great was the contrast on the roads about the first stage out of London in the morning. On the night-coaches coming up the coaches would be all dust or mud-covered ; and the passengers, if half of them were not asleep, looking somewhat seedy and knocked up, while on the down day-coaches all the passengers looked what is called sprack and fresh, the coaches shining and clean, and the horses also.

On some of the roads, at the first stage out of London, where a coach proprietor had a large number of horses standing, stables were built enclosing a square yard with gates, so that the whole establishment was kept private. Nelson had one at the London entrance into Hounslow ; Chaplin had a similar one at Whetstone, on the north road ; Horne's was at Finchley, just where the Great Northern Railway now crosses the old road,



and where his 'Bedford Times' used to make the first change. Chaplin had also another on the Brighton road, just beyond Croydon, and, if you look sharp just at the right time, as the Brighton train whisks by, you may see it; but at this day you would scarcely recognise it, the stables having been converted into cottages, which form a square, enclosing what was formerly the yard. It stands about fifty yards from the road, and has a high building at one end, which formed the lofts, in which all the hay and straw were kept. Old travellers by the Brighton coaches doubtless know the spot, and, as they pass, look on it with a lively and pleasing reminiscence of the days when they used to change there.

The active and continuous traffic on the principal roads in coaching days will scarcely be understood by those who have never seen it. You may travel a distance of ten miles or more, on one of them, and the probability is you will meet more tramps than conveyances or carriages of any sort, almost the only vehicles being carts and waggons. With the withdrawal of the traffic has naturally followed a difference in the condition of the roads, grass growing on each side, where it was formerly well metalled and hard, but now a space only sufficient to meet the requirements of the traffic is kept in order.

On broad roads, where there was a double turnpike-gate, with enough for a man or two to do all day in taking the tolls, you may now often see one gate shut up, with very little passing through the other during the whole day, to employ or enliven the pikeman or woman, as the case may be. Since this was written turnpikes have been almost abolished.

The old London coaching inns, with their stabling, have disappeared, as have many similar establishments further down the road which were worked in connection with them.



CHAPTER II.

DOWN THE ROAD ABOUT FORTY  
YEARS SINCE



## CHAPTER II.

I SELDOM pass the large pile of warehouses near the General Post Office, comprising Messrs. Pickfords' establishment and the 'Swan with Two Necks' yard and booking-offices for the receipt and transmission of goods by railway, without thinking what a vast alteration there has been in the locality since the time I first knew it, when the gateway out of the yard of the 'Swan with Two Necks,' through which the various coaches passed, and Milk Street and Lad Lane, were so narrow that it required some coachmanship to drive out a fresh team just started, and some care on the part of the guard that his horn or bugle-basket, which was usually hung on to the iron of the back seat of the coach nearest the roof, was not jammed against the gatepost, and, as the Americans say, 'chawed up.' Between four and five on an afternoon was a time worth being in that same yard of the 'Swan with Two Necks' to anyone who took an interest in coaching; three or four night coaches loading and

putting to in the small space pretty well filled it up, added to which another one generally arrived. There was the 'Commercial' Nottingham night coach; the Bristol, better known as 'The Old Company's' or 'Cooper's coach;' and the Birmingham 'Greyhound,' which latter generally got up a small illumination on its own account in the winter months, having two huge lamps on each side and a bull's-eye on the footboard; while the back premises were provided with a lamp attached to the hind boot for the special use of the guard in sorting his parcels in it. Anyone acquainted with the old yard and the entrance will recollect that there was not much room left at this busy time, but you would then generally hear the guard of the Manchester 'Defiance' blowing his horn as the coach came down Milk Street, and the coachman, Charley Harbidge, I think he was—at all events, a first-rate whip—disdaining to pull up his team into a walk, would turn them with the greatest neatness through the narrow serpentine entrance, in under the gateway, and turn them round in the yard far enough so as to leave the gateway clear behind his coach for the others to pass out at five o'clock. Some few stalls were round the yard, which were occupied by the night-coach horses during the day, and by day-coach horses during the night, the latter coming into London in the

course of the evening, probably between seven and nine o'clock, and leaving about six the next morning, while the night coaches, not reaching the city till about seven or eight, their horses were put into their vacant stables, which they left again about five in the afternoon. The greater part of the horses, however, working from the 'Swan with Two Necks' were in the stables under the booking-office, from whence you would see them emerge much as a barrel comes up out of the cellar under a public-house, barring that the horses came up in a lively way of their own accord, while the barrel is usually fetched up by the brewer's dray-horse at the end of a rope. One man's occupation in the neighbourhood has long been gone. He was the tenant of a small shop at the corner of a very narrow street; nearly opposite was Chandlers' Hall, but the site of his humble abode is now covered by one of the splendid warehouses recently built, and so entirely transmogrified that I doubt if I could spot his exact locality at the present day. His business, as appeared to me when I paid him a visit, which I used to delight in doing whenever I could find any pretext for it, consisted entirely in the manufacture of horns and bugles for mail- and coach-guards, and from his immediate proximity to the General Post Office, where all the mail-guards had to assemble every night, and also being near



the 'Bull and Mouth' and 'Swan with Two Necks' coaching establishments, insured him a pretty good business in his particular line. The variety of size and shape of the horns was considerable; the long tin horn, not very extensively patronised, but probably used by guards on cheap, slow coaches, and who did not care about turning out at all swellish; then there was the copper horn with a single twist, and two sharp notes, which, when well blown, as some of the guards could blow, was by no means unmelodious, and would wake up a sleepy horse-keeper in the middle of the night for some time before the coach got to 'the change,' or the pike, as the case might be; then there was the copper horn with two twists, and the long copper horn, varying in length from about three to four feet or more, with a very narrow bore, terminating in a bell shape, and with a German-silver mouthpiece. Again, there were the same shaped and sized horns in brass, brass key-bugles and copper key-bugles, large brass and copper horns, bugle-shaped without keys; in fact, there seemed to be in the little shop horns to suit the taste of any guard, even the most fastidious and swell, including those who used to turn out (I don't mean the mail-guards) in scarlet coats of the most approved down-the-road cut, white beaver hats, and drab trousers, or sometimes top-boots. Having a great taste for coaching,

and all things, as the lawyers have it, appurtenant thereto, I became desirous of possessing a horn which I could carry with me when travelling, and if it happened to be a coach on which there was not any guard, I could use my own instrument as an amateur. Accordingly, I hied to the little shop of my friend the horn-maker, got him to manufacture me one to order, and a beautiful little one he turned out certainly. It was brass, with two twists, oblong in shape, and the bell end flattened so as to lie in your pocket without sticking out inconveniently, and it had a German-silver mouth-piece. A man who could blow well would get out about five notes, I think, and would make it heard, especially on a clear frosty night, at a great distance. As coaches died away I had nought for my horn to do, and I believe, eventually having been considerably battered and dented by the children, who nearly burst themselves in vain endeavours to blow it, was surreptitiously 'caved in' by the nursemaid, who did not appreciate it, or approve of the sounds produced by the juvenile practitioners.

I have alluded to the stables under the booking-office of the 'Swan with Two Necks,' but those under the 'Bull and Mouth' yard, appeared when I visited them like a small town, and the horse-keeper as he went round with you would say—

Those are the Glasgow mail horses, those are Edinburgh, those are the Halifax 'Hope,' the Worcester night coach, the Exeter, the North Devon, or some of the other night coaches that would leave the yard in the afternoon or evening. When familiar with the various coaches out of London and the horses that worked them, I used to fancy that there was something about the stamp and character of the horses working from each establishment, and that the horses, for instance, working from the 'Bull and Mouth' would be all much of the same class; those from the 'Spread Eagle' of another; the 'Belle Sauvage' of another, and so on; and I think this probably might arise from all the horses in each establishment being purchased by one person, so that one man would fancy small short-legged horses, another those of a larger size, while a third would select those of a stronger and heavier description, especially if it was an establishment running slow heavy coaches and carrying six inside, of which, by-the-by, there were few in the latter days of coaching. There was also a marked difference between the teams working the coaches out of London for the first stage, and also for the first stage from the town at the other end, and those working over the middle-ground—not that some very good cattle were not often used by the middle-ground men, and could go probably quite

as well, or at all events get over the ground as fast, as the more showy horses working out of London, Cheltenham, Bath, Brighton, or some of the fashionable places, but where a coach with the horses put to was standing for some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour in the street, and being criticised by the various persons generally standing about either to see the coach or their friends start, the general appearance of the whole turn-out was narrowly scanned, and of course the coach turning out in the best style would naturally secure, not only the greatest number, but the best class, of passengers. In night coaches especially was the difference between the end and the middle-ground horses most marked, and some of the horses I have seen put to in a night coach or mail were a caution to behold, and such as the proprietor, who probably horsed a day-coach as well over the same stage, would have been ashamed to have exhibited in the daylight in the coach. The pick of a London coach proprietor's stock would begin their career in one of his crack day-coaches, and from thence, when getting rather less showy, they would get into the night-coach or perhaps mail out of London, and from thence, when not quite good-looking enough for that position, get drafted down a stage or two into the country, and thus never appear by daylight. The screws of all sorts and sizes that

one saw in the course of a night's journey used to amuse me much, not less, though, than the miraculous way in which they managed to go—and go they were obliged to sometimes, as it not unfrequently happened that they worked over that part of the journey where time was to be made up, if from any cause the coach was late. Appearance, certainly, was not studied in the night-coach or mail horses over the middle-ground, and most of them were like the animal described in the song of Arthur O'Bradley's Wedding—

Cropped, and docked, and fired, wind-galled, spavined, and  
blind,

Seldom if ever were tired, and lame with a leg behind.

With a bit of an incline to help them with a start and until they got warm, the team would manage to shuffle along, and if their stage was short, which would be the case, and it was a small galloping team, they would get over their ground, probably not more than five or six miles, in a marvellously short time, especially where it was an up and down road, so that they could spring well at the bottom of each descent and reach the top of the next incline without having to settle down into a trot, or get any continued heavy collar-work. If the horses would not bear inspection by daylight, what shall I say of the harness? Whether this, like the horses, had ever been worn by the

swell teams out of town with day-coaches, I cannot take upon myself to decide, but it was so totally different from any harness one ever saw in use in the daytime that it was impossible to identify it in its nocturnal condition.

To begin, it was all smeared over plentifully with oil, which, so far as I could ever ascertain, was the only article ever used by the night horse-keeper for doing up or preserving his harness. He certainly believed in oil, and from its constant application there was a thick, hard coating over all the surface of the leather, into which you might dig your nail. The colour, one must presume, had been originally black, but from the oily accumulation, mixed, no doubt, with some portions of mud and dust, it had assumed a grey or dusky sort of hue by moon or lamp light. Then, as to the terrets, buckles, and bits, the former might occasionally show that they were brass, but as often as not they appeared much the same shade as the bits, which certainly, as a rule, did not exhibit an atom of shine. They had, at some time or other, become thoroughly rusted all over, and came in, in common with the leather part of the harness, for the smearing with the oil-brush, as your gloves would testify if you did, as I used very often to, amuse yourself by helping to put to at the changes, and uncouple the wheelers—the leaders, for expe-

dition's sake, being always coupled before the coach arrived, and taken off at the end of the stage without uncoupling. I remember, however, on the Bristol mail, which was one of the fastest out of London, by way of saving every minute possible, they didn't uncouple the wheelers, but, having got the leaders off, the bars were whipped off the end of the pole, and then the wheelers walked away without the necessity of stopping to uncouple them, and when the changes were at roadside stables, so that the guard had no letter-bags to attend to, he assisted the coachman and horsekeeper in changing, and they were up and off again in a jiffy. I don't mean that it was quite the perfection of quick changing, such as was customary on the Manchester 'Telegraph,' Shrewsbury 'Wonder,' and other fast day-coaches running long distances, when there would be four or five men to assist in changing, the coachman not leaving his box, and the horses almost taken off before the coach had barely stopped. In the dead of the night there was no extraneous aid in the shape of idlers hanging about or lookers-on, so that the changing devolved entirely upon the solitary horsekeeper (the coachman and guard, if not otherwise engaged), when, according to his printed instructions from the post-office, it was his duty to assist in changing and getting the coach off expeditiously, which,

moreover, it was his interest to do, inasmuch as he carried the timepiece, and was responsible for the punctuality of the mail, having the power, however, to report to the post-office any delay arising from defective horsing or harness or the fault of the coachmen or horsekeepers. An instance of this occurred with respect to the Bath mail, which ran from London to Bath, only going through Devizes and Melksham ; while the Bristol mail went through Calne and Chippenham. Both left the White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, every night, at nearly the same time ; but the Bristol mail, being timed rather faster, gradually got in advance as they proceeded on the journey. A report, however, reached the General Post Office—whether officially or not I do not recollect—that the Bath mail was not keeping good time, and accordingly someone was sent down with the coach one night to see how it was worked and where the fault lay. At that time there were three or four brothers—all of them capital coachmen—driving on the Bath road, and one of them, ‘Harry,’ was driving the Bath mail the night an inspector or clerk was sent down to inspect and report. Getting by some means a hint as to who his box-passenger was, and the object of his journey, he bethought himself that he would have a lark with him. It would sometimes happen that the Bath mail, having all



its passengers and letter-bags up, got away from Piccadilly five minutes before the Bristol, in which case, perhaps, they reached Maidenhead or Twyford before being overtaken by the Bristol, and might both be changing at the same time and at the same stables. This was very nearly the means of depriving the Bath mail of its leaders one night. I was on the Bristol mail one night when they were both changing together, so that with the fresh horses and those that had come in there were sixteen about, when some one gave the alarm of 'Harry, your leaders are off!' and sure enough the fresh leaders for the Bath mail were just beginning to trot down the road coupled together, but not put to the mail. Fortunately, Harry was not far off, and, being pretty active, he was soon up to them, and had hold of their heads and brought them back again, and so prevented having to work the stage with a pair. To return, however, to our friend the clerk at the post-office (or inspector), whom I left on the box of the Bath mail on the night in question, my friend Harry, as he was generally called (one of the brothers), being the coachman. He confidentially imparted to the coachman of the Bristol mail (whether one of his brothers I am not sure) the circumstances connected with his box-passenger, adding this direction : ' Directly I come up alongside, you go along





as hard as you can.' All the coachmen on those mails being first-rate whips, they could spring their horses and gallop them along in a way that would have upset the coach with less steady and talented hands. Harry having found out that his box-passenger was of a very nervous, timid temperament, adopted the plan of frightening him a little, and took care at a change that one of his pole-chains should be a little slacker than the other, which, of course, didn't tend to steady the coach, and, while taking care that there should be no chance of upsetting, he managed to give it a sufficient sway to make his box-passenger anything but comfortable, especially when Harry's direction was carried out, which it was implicitly, for no sooner did his leaders come alongside the Bristol mail, than away went the whole team in a gallop, Harry following at the same pace. The result was, the box-passenger had soon had enough of it, and found that the mail kept time, and that there was no reason to complain of its being behind. A first-rate coachman was Harry, and what people call 'very good company' too; he would sit beside you on the box, and amuse you while you were driving for him, and, moreover, give you any instruction or information you might ask. For some time after the mails and the greater part of the coaches were off the road, he kept an inn, horsed one of the coaches

part of the way, and carried on posting and livery-stable business, including the 'black-job' department, which necessitated his keeping a hearse, mourning coaches, and black funeral horses, which, when the mortality was not great in the neighbourhood, and funerals were not looking up, were utilised by being worked in the coach, as I found one night when driving for him, and a black horse with a long tail down to the ground, was put in as near leader. I was naturally somewhat surprised to see the animal, which I need scarcely observe did not exactly match with the other horses in the coach, and of course led to my making some inquiry as to where he came from, and what he was when at home, and thus I became aware of the mournful nature of his day-work, which his considerate master no doubt thought to relieve by occasional work in the night-coach with other horses of a more lively turn. It reminds me of a tale I have heard somewhere about a man remarking to a costermonger, 'That's a very wretched-looking donkey you've got there. What's the matter with it?' 'Yes, sir, he is,' responded the coster; 'a werry miserable ass. He've bin a-standing 'twixt two mourning-coach 'orses for a fortnight, and he ain't rekivered his 'spirits.' I only remember one other coach in which I ever saw a mourning-coach horse working, and that was the 'Royal Blue,' a

coach running between Worcester and Birmingham, and which regularly worked from Worcester to Bromsgrove with four black horses with long tails down to the ground, and the coachman—named, if I recollect rightly (for I was then but a schoolboy there), Brown—appeared rather to pride himself on a quick start, as he always had his horses let off as he was taking his last step or two up, and they were all moving before he was seated on the box. There were then some very good coaches on that line of road between Birmingham and Bristol, and Birmingham and Bath, passing through Worcester, Gloucester, and Cheltenham, and some of the coachmen of the regular old Weller school—two I particularly remember, and have them as clearly before me in my mind's eye as the day I last saw them. As they must now have been dead many years I need not fear hurting their feelings by any allusion to their personal appearance. Both were immensely fat, and with difficulty could mount the box; one, the fatter, I think, and most unwieldy of the two, was named Collis, or, as he was always called, 'Old Collis,' used to drive the 'Yorkhouse,' a coach running between Birmingham and Bath from the former place to Worcester and back every day, except Sunday. Not over hard work certainly, or calculated to bring down much of a man's fat, seeing that it was only two stages of fourteen

miles each ; that is, from Birmingham to Bromsgrove, and thence on to Worcester, returning in the afternoon. The other type of the Weller school was one 'Old George,' who drove the 'Traveller,' a Birmingham and Bristol coach, over the same ground as 'Old Collis.' Both of these men were so heavy that they could not mount the box in the ordinary way by the steps on the boot with the assistance of the left hand, taking hold of the iron rail of the box-seat, and putting the foot up on to the foot-board ; but both of them used, by dint of great exertion, to get a knee up on to the foot-board first of all, and then, by means of herculean efforts, or what Weller called, 'one strong convulsion,' they would manage to drag themselves up, aided, as I have many a time seen them (and indeed with Collis it was generally so), by a shove up behind from the horsekeeper or some porter, bystander, or stablekeeper. These old fellows, as may be supposed, were not very well adapted for unmanageable horses, but there chanced to be a grey horse that worked in the 'Traveller,' and was, I suppose, rather beyond 'Old George,' who, by way of subduing and taming him down a bit, used sometimes to drive him in the two stages in succession, so that not satisfied with having driven him a fourteen-miles stage from Birmingham, he would have the three other fresh horses put to at

Bromsgrove, and drive the grey on to Worcester. It was not a fast coach certainly, and the grey being a very good-looking horse, so far as my schoolboy judgment went, did not appear seriously affected by the treatment pursued. I must say though, that it looked rather hard to see him standing by the pole when the three other horses were taken off, and it gave me very much the idea of a boy who is left at school during the holidays, which in those days was to my mind the most frightful and awful thing that could happen to a boy. I am happy, however, to say I never had practically to undergo the misery of it in *propria personâ*. Our school, one of Edward VI.'s, was a fine old red brick building, familiar to all who were in the habit of travelling between Worcester and Birmingham. It fronted the high road, so that we could see everything that passed in the way of coaches, 'yellow po'shays,' or other vehicles; and thus those of the boys who took an interest in the coaches, and many of us did, could tell not only the time every coach was to pass, together with the shape, colour, and lettering upon it, but also the coachman, and every horse in the team. It is many years since that I am speaking of, but at that time, by the roadside, about a mile out of Bromsgrove towards Worcester, was a cottage with a board stuck up in the garden, bear-



ing this inscription: 'Four children at a birth living here;' and it will readily be understood that the curiosity of travellers led them—especially ladies in their own carriages—almost invariably to stop and see the children, and they did not, of course, depart without leaving a trifle behind them, and thus the children, so far from being a misfortune to their parents, were, I take it, a great blessing, and realised the somewhat startling and apparently anomalous position, that it may cost less to a keep a family of four children than one—a result, however, which, like many others, I have not personally been able to experience. The four children at the cottage were not a bad illustration of the familiar story of the Jew knife-dealer, who declared that he lost money by every knife he sold, and being then asked how it was he managed to live, or why he didn't discontinue selling them, replied that it was only the number he sold that made it pay. So I suppose that the four children at a birth paid uncommonly well, while one, two, or three, each born at different times, might have been some trouble for their parents to maintain and provide for; this I have experienced.

Connected with my school days at Bromsgrove was an event which to us as schoolboys was thoughtlessly looked upon as a great boon and a source of much rejoicing. The cholera broke out

somewhat severely in the town, so that it was deemed advisable to pack us all off immediately, and this being announced to us during dinner-time one Sunday, within about two or three hours we were all dispersed in postchaises either to Birmingham or Worcester, whence we took coaches or got on by some other means, myself being sent to Birmingham with other boys in the well-known 'po'shay,' where I took a place by the mail to Bristol, and had my first night's travelling outside a mail, much to my delight, and with a feeling of considerable importance. The guard seeing, I suppose, that I was a boy from school unexpectedly turned out for the night, very kindly lent me an extra coat, so that I passed a very pleasant night of it, arriving in Bristol about six o'clock in the morning.



## CHAPTER III.

### COACH BUILDING



### CHAPTER III.

STAGE coach manufacturing was a trade of itself in the old coaching days, there being some six persons only in London who carried it on, and they confined their business exclusively to this branch, not building any other description of vehicle.

The principal men were Wright and Powell, of Ray Street, Clerkenwell; Gower, of Stratford, and Waude in the Old Kent Road, just opposite the Bricklayers' Arms. Their mode of conducting their business with the coach proprietors was this—they built the coaches according to the fancy of their various customers as to size, shape, colour, &c. If it was a day-coach leaving London early in the morning, say from the 'Bull and Mouth,' and furnished by Waude, he would have a clean coach in the yard drawn up from his factory by one horse ready for starting the next morning; and if you went to one of the large coaching yards late at night, you would see it full of all the day-coaches, looking as trim and smart as could be, ranged in a

row, or one behind the other, according to the size and space in the yard. The coaches arriving from the country were taken back to the factory, where they were overhauled, cleaned, and, if necessary, oiled and greased ready for the journey the next day. The proprietors paid a mileage of two-pence or threepence a mile for the coaches, which included everything except damage occasioned by gross negligence or carelessness, this being very different from the conditions on which the mails were furnished.

Some few of the London proprietors had coaches built for them which they did not then hire on the mileage plan, or were their own builders, in which case they stipulated with their partners who worked the coaches with them that they should provide the coaches and charge the mileage against the general body in the same way that the ordinary builder did; in this way the London man perhaps made something out of the coach, whereby it paid him in addition to the booking-office and portage fees and other advantages, while the middle man, with nothing but the horsing to look to, barely covered his expenses, and perhaps not always did that.

Fagg, of the 'Bell and Crown,' Holborn, had a coach-building establishment at Hartley Row, and Sherman, of the 'Bull and Mouth,' had also one.

His coaches were all built on the same model, which was a peculiar one, and nearly every coach was yellow, the celebrated Shrewsbury 'Wonder' not excepted. This, however, was furnished by Waude, and built on *his* peculiar and original model. It had this peculiarity about it, that the sides were perfectly flat, and not bowed out at all, as coaches usually were to afford more room inside. I am not aware that there was any patent attached to this build, or that he was in any way empowered to use it exclusively, but I do not remember to have seen coaches after this pattern built by anyone else. It gave an appearance of smartness and compactness to the coach totally different from that of the 'Bull and Mouth' build. For a coach travelling from London to Shrewsbury, and at the rate of the 'Wonder,' through a hilly country, it was obliged to be made of the best materials, and as light as practicable consistent with safety, and accordingly Waude managed to turn them out at about 17 or 18 cwt. Coaches built for heavy nightwork and magazine nights required larger boots and more capabilities for stowing away a huge mass of luggage and parcels. By way of affording some extra accommodation for this purpose the Halifax 'Hope,' a 'Bull and Mouth' coach, had an iron fixed at the bottom of the hind boot, so that on emergency the whole of the back of the



coach, from the bottom of the hind boot to the crown of the guard's head, might be covered with heavy packages. A night-coach, what you might call heavily armed or fully equipped, looked almost like a small mountain when you stood on the ground, and it seemed wonderful how such a ponderous mass could be got through the country at anything like a pace—but it was.

Before quitting the subject of coach-building I should mention the 'York House' day-coach to Bath, which was of a singular but elegant build. It ran from the 'Belle Sauvage,' Ludgate Hill, as did also the 'Monarch,' a night-coach from the same place to Bristol. The night-coach was necessarily of a heavier description, and constructed for the carriage of more luggage and parcels than the day-coach. Williams, a Bristol builder, provided these coaches, as also the 'Emerald,' a day-coach from London to Bristol, horsed out of London by Chaplin, from the 'Spread Eagle' in Gracechurch Street. There were not coaches of this peculiar build on any other road out of London. It is not very easy to describe it, but the principal features in it were the front boot being perfectly perpendicular from the footboard downwards, instead of slanting inwards at the bottom. This, of course, added considerably to the size of the boot, which would hold a quantity of heavy luggage, such as port-

manteaus, and keep the weight down low, instead of being on the roof of the coach. The boots were also the same width as the body of the coach, and there was not any ledge (if it may be so called) under the boots and body of the coaches; this gave a light appearance to them. And in awarding the palm to the most stylish and neatest coach out of London, I should say it would have rested between the 'York House,' the 'Wonder,' or the Birmingham 'Tally Ho,' which, with a white body and red wheels and under carriage, was a very showy-looking turn-out.

Although the Brighton was a very crack road as regarded the travelling, there was not anything very striking in the coaches themselves.

If the guard of the night-coach sometimes found it a difficulty in getting all the luggage of his ten or twelve passengers outside and four inside, and his parcels into and on to his coach, the coachman of the mail, with the luggage of his seven or eight passengers only, was often very much pressed for room for it and all his parcels in the limited space at his disposal. A small quantity of luggage he might put on the roof; but if there were more mail-bags than the guard could stamp into the hind boot he strapped them on to the roof, so that the only receptacle the coachman had for his parcels (of which there were not a few, or of small

value) was the front boot. As he had no time for sorting and looking out the parcels at the different towns on the road, the plan adopted was somewhat the same as with the letters; he would have small bags put into the boot in London labelled for the principal towns on the road, and containing the parcels to be left at each, so that when stopping to change he had only to take out the bag and give it to the person there to receive it, sometimes the horsekeeper. In the coaches all the 'short parcels' were put into the hind boot, so that there was no occasion to be continually troubling the box passenger 'to lift up his legs,' and the guard with his hind-boot lamp could do all the parcel business without inconveniencing anyone.

The front boot of the old mail coach, as built by Vidler, was very capacious, but the last build of mail was a great improvement in every respect; it was constructed so as to give much more leg room to the inside passengers, and I daresay was much more comfortable, but I can't say I was ever inside a mail.

As regards general appearance and style, the new mails were very superior to the old; they were hung better, and so as to carry a considerable weight without being top-heavy. The old mails were unnecessarily high, and hung in a peculiar way, with a cross-spring behind, which can only

now be seen in what is called the mail phaeton, in consequence of being hung in the same way as the mails.

Various plans were adopted by the stage-coach builders for securing the safety of the passengers, and avoiding accidents by upsetting, which not only seriously damaged the coaches, but led to expenses for repairs and injuries which the coach proprietor sometimes declined to recognise as falling on himself.

Many of the coaches were advertised in their bills as being 'patent safety,' but I was unable to discover wherein the patent safety lay, or how they differed in their construction from the ordinary run of coaches.

Two or three plans there were, however; one was, having the hind axle made with a crank, so that the hind boot was let down lower between the wheels than with the straight axle, but this was not adopted in many coaches out of London.

One mode of keeping the weight down as low as possible, and avoiding the coach being top-heavy, was having the luggage irons on the roof project beyond the sides of the coach, instead of continuing up perpendicularly with the side of the coach as in the old style. By this means a larger quantity of baggage could be packed on the roof

without piling it up so high as was necessary when the roof-irons ran straight up.

Another invention was patented for improving the safety of coaches, but for some reason or another, probably from an increase in weight, it did not find favour with the coach proprietors. It was worked for a short time on the Nottingham 'Commercial,' a night-coach from the 'Swan with Two Necks,' and of which there was an admirable model exhibited at the Coaching Exhibition in Bond Street.

The machinery being out of sight, it was not, from a casual inspection, easy to understand the exact construction of it, but I will endeavour to give a description of it.

The coach, instead of being above the springs and resting upon blocks attached to them, was suspended from two points as high as the roof, there being two boxes, one in front and the other behind the body of the coach, running up as high as the roof, and the front seat being partly on the roof and partly on this box, the back roof seat being similarly placed on the hinder box; thus the whole weight of the coach, with all the luggage and inside passengers, was below the points of suspension, so to speak, of the coach. It would appear that to upset a coach so constructed was almost an impossibility; but that it did not repay

the inventor would appear from the circumstance that the period for which the patent was originally granted having expired, Lord Brougham interested himself, but whether successfully or not I do not remember, in procuring an extension of the patent, on the ground that it had not had a sufficient time to render it remunerative.

On the Manchester 'Beehive,' a fast coach from the 'Belle Sauvage,' they had a box on the roof to carry the luggage, with two lids to close down over the top of it, which precluded the packing the luggage above the top of the box.

This coach once had a frightful accident when racing with another, and the coachman's leg was broken. The accident occasioned some stir at the time, and, I rather think, resulted in the death of a passenger. One of Sherman's coaches was the one the 'Beehive' was racing against, or else a guard of one of his coaches happened to be riding on it, and gave evidence on an inquest or inquiry connected with the accident. There must be many persons, I should think, living who could give a more detailed account of it, but I do not know the exact locality. I used to see Everett, the coachman, who had his leg broken, walking about London for some years after the 'Beehive' was off the road—one leg was considerably bowed.

The 'Beehive' was a crack coach, as may be

inferred from the following advertisement which the proprietors issued when they first started it :—

*New Coach from the 'Beehive' Coach Office.*

Merchants, buyers, and the public in general visiting London and Manchester, are respectfully informed that a new coach, called the 'Beehive,' built expressly and fitted up with superior accommodation for comfort and safety to any coach in Europe, will leave 'La Belle Sauvage,' Ludgate Hill, London, at eight every morning, and arrive in Manchester the following morning, in time for the coaches leaving for Carlisle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. Passengers travelling to the north will reach Carlisle the following morning, being only one night on the road. The above coach will leave the 'Beehive' Coach Office, Market Street, near the Exchange, Manchester, every evening at seven, and arrive in London the following afternoon at three. All small parcels sent by this conveyance will be delivered to the furthest part of London within two hours after the arrival of the coach. In order to insure safety and punctuality with respectability, no large packages will be taken, or fish of any description carried by this conveyance. The inside of the coach is fitted up with spring cushions and a reading lamp lighted with wax, for the accommodation of those who wish to amuse themselves on the road. The inside backs and seats are also fitted up with hair cushions, rendering them more comfortable to passengers than anything hitherto brought out in the annals of coaching, and, to prevent frequent disputes respecting seats, every seat is numbered. Persons booking themselves at either of the above places will receive a card with a number upon it, thereby doing away

with the disagreeables that occur daily in the old style. The route is through Stockport, Macclesfield, Congleton, Newcastle, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Coventry, Dunchurch, Stony Stratford, Towcester, Brickhill, Dunstable, and St. Albans, being the most level line of country, avoiding the danger of the steep hills through Derbyshire.

Performed by the public's obedient servants,

ROBERT NELSON, London; F. CLARE, Stony  
Stratford; ROBERT HADLEY AND Co.,  
Manchester.

This bill does not convey a bad idea of the style in which coaching was done in the olden days, and the spirit of rivalry that existed among the different proprietors.





## CHAPTER IV.

### COACH PAINTING



## CHAPTER IV.

SEEING some articles on carriages and carriage building in 'Land and Water,' it occurs to me it may not be wholly devoid of interest to the young coaching men of the present day to know a little about the manner in which stage coaches were—I can hardly call it embellished, but—painted in the old coaching days, although it is not very easy to convey an accurate idea of their appearance without a painted illustration.

Some of the old cross-country coaches far away from London would astonish a man who has never seen anything but the neat drags of the present day. A few of the London coaches, principally on the Brighton road, most nearly approached the style and appearance of the present day. The Brighton 'Age,' when driven by Sir Vincent Cotton, was one of this class. 'Brighton—London' was painted over the top of the door, and the names of one or more proprietors on the door-panel, in accordance, I believe, with the requirements of the

law at that time. At all events, the Act of Parliament directed how and where the name should be, and it had to be in a more conspicuous place than it is now. At the back of the coach, just below the hind seat, was the word 'Age.' In the way coaches are now built there is not any place above the hind boot where a name can be put, but it was otherwise when the wooden panelling was continued up to the hind seat—a plan almost universally adopted for the greater facility it afforded of putting packages on the luggage-iron at the back. Of all the coaches that ran out of London, I remember one only that was built in the present mode, and that was a Sudbury coach from the 'Belle Sauvage.'

While it is now the object to have as little lettering on the coach as is consistent with the due publicity of the places between which it travels, in the olden time the desire was—at least, so it appeared—to have as much lettering and as many names on the coach as possible. For instance, under the footboard on the front boot might be seen, in large letters, the names of the two places between which the coach worked, while on a narrow slip of wood at the top of the footboard was the name of the coach. The box, which had a flat side of wood, and not merely rails, as in the present style, had the name painted of some place through which the coach passed, with perhaps the

name of the inn in that town where the coach changed. On each of the upper sides of the coach, and parallel with the windows, would be a scroll with some name on it, and on the lower part of the body names from one end of it to the other, thus :—

BIRMINGHAM—WORCESTER—GLOUCESTER—BRISTOL.

On the door just below the window were the proprietors' names, and as all those connected with the coach were desirous of having their names advertised on it, sometimes there were as many as half-a-dozen, one under the other. On the side of the hind and front boots one or more names were painted. On the back of the hind boot were more names of places, and by way of further ornamentation or display of pictorial art there would be a broad yellow rim following the outline of the front and hind boots, but about two or three inches from it.

The London coaches did not indulge in so much display, and consequently looked neater.

According to the number of words to be put on a coach, I conclude the painter charged, which must have somewhat added to the expense of the coach ; but the appearance, I presume, made it look more showy, in the eyes of the proprietors at least.

This reminds me of the story of a hatter who was about having painted up over his shop, 'Good hats sold here,' when a wag passing along stepped into the shop, and politely inquired of the hatter if he was about to pay for the number of words to be put up, and on his replying that he was, the wag suggested that he thought he might save him some expense, for which the hatter thanked him, and the wag then proceeded to submit his economical plan in the following manner, and this conversation ensued :—

Wag : 'I think you might dispense with the word "good," as no one supposes you would sell bad hats.'

Hatter : 'Yes, I think I might.'

Wag : 'And then it is not necessary to put up "hats," as any person can see them in the window, and does not suppose you deal in anything else.'

Hatter : 'Yes, "hats" can be dispensed with perhaps.'

Wag : 'There is no occasion to put up "sold," as nobody would imagine you gave them away.'

Hatter : 'No.'

Wag : 'Of course it is not necessary to put up "here," as people see the shop, and know it is not round the corner or in the next street.'

This was an undeniable fact, which the hatter was unable to gainsay.

But to return to coaches. The names painted on them were really of use, as indicating the places through which they travelled.

All the London coach proprietors had the signs of their inns painted on the door or hind boot of their coaches. Thus the 'Bull and Mouth'—it may now be seen up on the 'Queen's Hotel,' formerly the 'Bull and Mouth Inn,'—was painted on all Sherman's coaches; a spread eagle, a swan with two necks, or white horse on Chaplin's, according to the inn from which they started; a bell and crown on Fagg's coaches; a Saracen's head on Mountain's; a bull on Nelson's in Aldgate; three nuns on Israel Alexander's in the same locality; a female savage with a bell in her hand, for Nelson's on Ludgate Hill; a tun with an arrow in the bung-hole for Gray's in Fleet Street; a golden cross, cross keys, or St. George spearing a blue boar, for Horne's three establishments. The mails were all painted uniformly to the direction of the Postmaster-General, no proprietors' names being on them. On the doors only the names of the places between which they travelled were painted, as 'London, Edinburgh.' On the sides of the front boot were the letters 'V.R.' in the present reign, and on the side of the hind boot a number, as 'No. 20'; on each of the side panels of the coach body was painted a motto in a circle, three



of which were, 'Quis separabit,' 'Tria juncta in uno,' 'Nemo me impune lacessit;' the fourth I cannot recollect.

To describe the different colours of the bodies and wheels of the various coaches would be a very long and tedious matter, as they were done either to display the taste of the coach builder, or meet the wishes of the coach proprietors. Some of the London men, however, had nearly all their coaches of the same colour. The 'Bull and Mouth' were all yellow; Nelson's, from the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, all light red; Fagg's, from the 'Bell and Crown,' dark maroon bodies and light red wheels; the country proprietor, Moses Pickwick, of the 'White Hart,' Bath, the appearance of whose name on the coach-door raised the ire of Sam Weller, followed the example of the London men—every one of the coaches running from the 'White Hart' having chocolate bodies with yellow wheels.

The descriptions I have been able to give of the coaches in the olden days will fail, I fear, to convey a very accurate idea to those who have never actually seen them, but it will doubtless freshen up the memories of many old roadsters.

## CHAPTER V.

### HOW I BECAME A COACH HORSE



## CHAPTER V.

I WAS a bay horse, about three-parts bred, plenty of bone and strength, and rising six at the time when coaching was in its most palmy days. A good trotter, with good pluck and spirit, I could go at twelve or thirteen miles an hour, and belonged to the rector of the parish of Hikirk-cum-Openpuse, who was a man of independent property, and fond of a little bit of blood and having something that could go, but, as he did not appear in the hunting field, my duty, while in his service, consisted in drawing the carriage (I suppose I mustn't say four-wheeled trap or 'one-horse shay') in which the rector, his wife, and the juvenile members of the clerical family were conveyed about the country. The work was light and easy, as was also the trap, so much so that with the rattle of it behind I must confess to an occasional disposition to 'step it' with the whole concern, especially as the rattle and frequent touches of the dashboard on my tail more than once very nearly

induced me to 'lift up.' The rector, I believe, was an average sort of driver, and might possibly have continued my owner for some years, but one day, in driving out of a neighbouring town, the carriage, four-wheeled trap, one-horse shay, or whatever else it might be called, came into violent collision with something, but the blinkers prevented me seeing what it was. Whether the rector drew into summut or summut drew into him I never knew; but this I do know, the concussion very nearly threw me down, and so terrified me that I bolted as hard as I could go, leaving, I believe, the better half of the trap behind me, together with the rector, his wife, and the other occupants of the carriage. The dashboard and so much of the carriage as was still attached to me I quickly disposed of by kicking it to smithereens, with the exception of two broken shafts, which dangled about, and gave me jagged cuts here and there. Ultimately, I believe, I ran against something, and was knocked down. By this time I was nearly dead with fright, and cannot give any account of what happened, but before I got up again I heard some one say, 'Sit on 'is 'ead, Bill! sit on 'is 'ead!' and immediately a heavy weight came down on my head as I lay on my side. Some operation of undoing the harness seemed to be going on, when all at once the weight was removed off my head, I felt a lick with

a strap or stick over my back, a 'Hie up' from one of the bystanders, whereupon I sprang to my feet, and was led away, covered with mud, cuts, and broken harness, followed by a mob.

Eventually I was taken back to the stables at the rectory ; but, of course, before my arrival the news of the accident was all over the village, and kind and sympathising friends called at the rectory, some to make inquiries and hear all about it, others, especially the male part of the parishioners, to offer advice. From what I could hear, the remarks of the female visitors were something after this style :

'Oh, my dear ! I never would ride behind that brute again.'

'Oh, Mrs. —, I wonder how your husband could ever take you out in the carriage with that horrid horse. I always said to my husband when he met you, I am sure the rector will have an accident with that horse some day.'

'What a providential escape you had ! I have so often feared that something would happen with that horse, and thought what should we all do if anything happened to the rector.'

Then came the male parishioners, including the sporting man who knew all about horses.

'I say, rector, how could you think of driving that horse at the cheek ? He wants a good strong

bit, should be curbed up pretty tightly, and driven at the bottom bar.'

No. 2—'I'm not at all surprised at your getting into a mess with that horse the other day. I noticed as you passed me your man had not buckled up the breeching short enough, and I suppose the trap ran on to his heels and started him. Take my advice ; never you drive him again.'

No. 3—The master of the neighbouring pack of hounds happening to meet the rector. 'You'd a narrow escape the other day. That horse won't be safe for you to drive your wife and family out again in that low-wheeled trap of yours.'

Whereupon the rector feeling slightly (and his wife and family very) nervous, he determined on selling me, and after keeping me a while till the marks and cuts caused by the accident were somewhat less conspicuous, I was sent up to Dixon's Repository in London, as the phrase was, 'to sell for what I would fetch.'

Travelling up by road—nothing but racehorses were carried in those days ; there were no railways—I was duly stalled at Dixon's two or three days before the sale by auction. A number of other horses were there, and many persons came and inspected us, but my attention was particularly attracted to one person who, without being at all horsey in appearance, seemed quite at home with

all the people connected with the establishment ; in fact, as it seemed to me, he must be a good customer and constant attendant at the sales. He had several horses out to look at before the sale day, including myself among the number, but it struck me that he did not have any out from idle curiosity, but only such as he really thought might be likely to suit him.

The public sale day came. We were all got up to show off to the best advantage—manes and tails combed and brushed, and grooming to the very greatest nicety.

The knight of the hammer who officiated on that day was a jolly-looking old gentleman with a rubicund face, and seemed to leave no stone unturned, as far as talk went certainly, to sell each to the greatest advantage.

A word or two may not be out of place with regard to the sale-yard and the persons connected with the stables.

A small pulpit in which the auctioneer was mounted was at one end of the yard next to the counting-house. As each horse was brought out for sale it was immediately below him, and from thence was run down a freshly sprinkled gravel ride.

Two or three stablemen, each dressed in a long snow-white cotton jacket reaching far below the



hips, knee corduroy breeches, white stockings and lace-up boots, polished so bright that you might see to shave in them, led the horses up for sale, and away after they were sold.

Of course I didn't know how I was described in the catalogue, but I could hear constantly before it came to my turn to be taken out the description of other horses as they were taken up to be sold.

'Quiet to ride and drive, quiet to ride—carries a lady,' and a variety of other characters given, so I naturally began to wonder what would be said about me, and what character I should have.

While I stood at the stable door, and ready to be taken up by one of the stablemen I have described, the horse next in the catalogue before me was sold as much as may be like this:—

Auctioneer: 'What shall I say for the little bay 'orse, gentlemen? Quiet to ride and drive; quiet in 'arness. Run him down, Bill.'

Trim Stableman: 'By leave, gents; by leave.' Whereupon he twisted the horse round with his hand, holding the bridle close to the horse's mouth, shoved it up in the air as high as he could reach, and ran down the ride by the horse's side, lifting his own feet so high that the heels of his highlows nearly hit him in the small of the back at each step; and it seemed to me that he was endeavouring to show the horse how to lift *his* feet. Cuts

from surrounding whips were freely bestowed on the horse as he ran up and down the ride. Thought I, that looks pleasant ; I suppose it will be my turn next.

Returned to the pulpit, one or two men went up to the horse, held him tightly round the wind-pipe, and gave him a good dig in the ribs with the fist or a stick.

The auctioneer now having got a bid of eleven guineas, went on thus : 'Eleven guineas ; eleven guineas and a 'arf, eleven and a 'arf ; eleven and a 'arf only for the little bay 'orse, quiet to ride and drive, and quiet in 'arness. Twelve guineas ; twelve and a 'arf only is bid for the little bay 'orse, quiet to ride and drive, and quiet in 'arness, and to be sold ! Run him down again.' Whereupon the process of running down as before was repeated, and eventually the little bay 'orse was knocked down, as well as I could hear, at eighteen and a 'arf, the hammer falling, if my eyes did not deceive me, to the nod of the individual who had already had me out for inspection on a previous day.

I had now been standing a few minutes in the stable-door with the bridle on, and held by one of the stablemen ready to be brought out, when the auctioneer's hammer went down with a sharp rap, and the stableman holding the little bay 'orse shouted out some words of one syllable, when the

stableman holding my bridle immediately started me up to the auctioneer's pulpit.

While some of the previous lots were being sold, I was wondering what would be said about me when I was brought up to the hammer; and I began to feel rather like a servant-girl, as they say, 'without any character from her last place.'

The natty stableman trotted me sharply up the ride, much in the same style as his mate had done the 'little bay 'orse,' and I stood with head and tail well up. It must not be forgotten that I still bore about me the marks of the little game in the rectorial trap, manifested by divers cuts on the hocks and elsewhere from the broken, dangling shafts and fall on the ground, &c.

The auctioneer began thus :

'Lot 86—a powerful bay 'orse, well-bred, six years old, a fast trotter, and to be sold. Run him down.' Now I had to pass through the same ordeal as 'the little bay 'orse,' receiving sundry cuts from the whips of the bystanders as I went down the ride and back again. I lashed out several times, and only regretted that I did not succeed in landing one of my hind shoes among the teeth of some of the whippers-in. I went through much the same process as 'the little bay 'orse,' and was, I afterwards found out, bought by the same person. What was the next scene, or where I was destined

to go, I had not the slightest notice. The next morning, however, I was taken away with 'the little bay 'orse' and four others that had been sold the same day by an ostler-looking sort of man, who received his directions from the person that had bought me, and who, it turned out, was the foreman of one of the large London coach proprietors. There was a string of six of us, and the directions were to leave four at the stables at Hounslow, and leave the other two (which included myself) at some place, the name of which I did not catch, but was some eight or nine miles beyond. Thinks I to myself, 'What little game is up now? What is to be the work—single, double harness, four-wheeler, two-wheeler, hunter, hack, or what?'

Having left the four at Hounslow, we reached the destination of the pair of us. I was put into a stable—a good, substantial, comfortable-looking place—where there were eight horses, standing four on each side, not in stalls, but divided only from each other by bales. If not handsome, they were certainly horses that looked as if they had plenty of go in them. Lots of collars and harness were hanging up in the stable. At the ends of some of the traces I noticed metal eyes, such as I had seen on traces of leaders in the coaches which had often passed me when in the rectorial trap. Putting two and two together, I now began to

smell a rat, and came to the conclusion that I was in the company of coach horses, and had been bought to run in a coach. I was not long in doubt, for the next day my *quondam* acquaintance, the foreman, walked into the stable and said to the horsekeeper:—

‘Put this bay horse near-wheeler into the Bristol mail up on Sunday morning.’

Why this particular time and place were fixed upon I afterwards found out, so may as well divulge the secret (if any) at once.

The history of it was this. There being no delivery of letters in London on the Sunday morning, the mails were not strictly kept to time, and their arrival there an hour or so later than the usual time enabled the coach masters to ease their horses a little, and in this way was a slight boon to them. Having thus time to spare, they tried new horses on these mornings, and if they turned out not quite fast enough, or any time was lost in getting them put to or starting, it did not matter. The mail was thus rendered a sort of break, and made trial trips with new horses. In this way my turn came. It was a beautiful morning in the summer, and about four o'clock, when I heard a most musical sound of a horn, and the horsekeeper led myself and three other horses out of the stable into the main road.

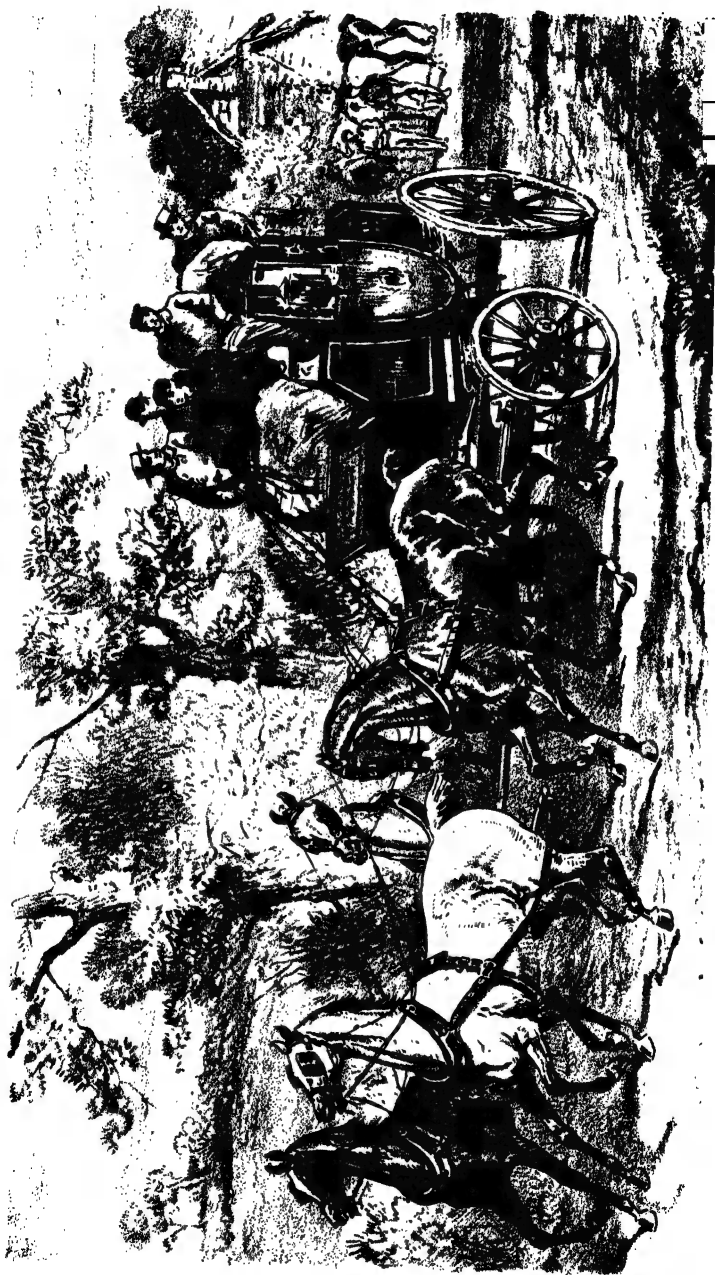
The mail soon drew up, but had scarcely stopped when I saw the coachman's eyes upon me. Throwing the reins down on each side, he was by me in less than a pig's whisper (whatever period of time that may denote), looked me well over—the rectorial trap marks evidently not escaping his keen and practised eye—he gave me a kind and friendly stroke down the nose and neck, as much as to say, ‘I like the look of you, and I have no doubt we shall get on well together.’ He appealed to Jem, the horsekeeper, who was putting to, for some information as to my history ; but all Jem could say was—‘The guv'nor sent him down, and said as 'ow he was to work up with you this mornin'.’

We were now put to, and the coachman, who was a first-rate hand, up to all sorts of horses, and lots of nerve, was up on his box, and had us all in hand in a jiffey, when ‘Let 'em go, Jemmy ! Chi, Chit !’ and we were let go.

I had not been in harness since the accident, and never in anything heavy ; I felt very nervous and frightened, and half-inclined to kick, with the idea of getting rid of the carriage behind me as I had done with the rector's. On the other hand, it occurred to me that I might fare better if I made a bolt of it, and I adopted the latter course ; but I had never been in mail before, and had no idea of

what it was trying to bolt with a coach with seven or eight passengers, the roof loaded with luggage, and the fore and hind boots filled with parcels and letterbags. In my ignorance, therefore, I raised myself on my hind-legs, and exerting my utmost strength made a terrific rush at my collar, the result of which was that I snapped my outside trace at the buckle; and the other three horses assisting in getting the coach off, we went about fifty yards before the coachman could pull up, when he sung out to the guard, who by this time was in his seat, 'Near-side trace broke, Charley.' It did not take long for Charley to get a chain trace out of his toolbox, which the mail guards always carried, and substitute it for the broken one, when, 'Put him down to the bottom bar, Charley,' from the coachman, set us all right, and we started again. For the remainder of the stage, I think I may say we—I being the only stranger in the team—went well. I was not deficient in strength, was fresh, and being, as I have said, rather nervous, I answered very readily to the slightest touch of the whip or the coachman's signal; and I believe at the end of the stage had made a favourable impression on him.

Having been worked awhile over this stage, sometimes in one thing and sometimes another, till the outward indications of my accident had nearly







disappeared, and I had been steadied down, I was promoted to the dignified position of wheeler in a swell day-coach out of London. My work consisted in going from the City to Hounslow, leaving Piccadilly between seven and eight in the morning, and returning the next evening; the rest horses taking their turn, and the coach not running on Sundays. I was now about at the top of the tree: coach harness, and all the appointments first-rate; our coachman and passengers of the swell order. Frequently dahlias, roses, peonies, or other flowers in our bridles. I believe everything, from the soles of our shoes to the crown of the coachman's hat, or the top of the luggage on the roof, felt proud of the turn-out as it bowled past Hyde Park Corner. It was summer when I first commenced my coaching career, and the most trying part of it and that which I disliked the most was sleeping in the stables in London, underground. As we worked out of town one morning, we worked into London the next evening, and coming hot out of the coach, going into a stable underground, when there might be considerably over a dozen of other horses under the same circumstances, and sleeping there the night, was no joke; in fact, you were scarcely dry in the morning. Barring this, the work was not objectionable. The teams out of London were not, as I found out late in life, called on to make

up time or do any galloping work ; true, it was a good steady pull from Piccadilly to Hounslow on flat ground ; but then you were not required to go at the same pace as the horses over the lower ground ; the road was always a good hard granite, which was more than could be said of some lower down in the country. For some time I continued working out of London, and once during this time had the honour of being a member of the birthday team in one of the mails. This was a grand day always before the introduction of railways.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MY NIGHT WORK WHEN A COACH HORSE



## CHAPTER VI.

FOR some years I worked in one or other of the crack day-coaches down the western road, and in Piccadilly our team and turn-out was frequently scanned over by some of the gentlemen interested in coaching. I particularly remember Sir Henry Peyton, whose yellow drag and four greys were so well known in London at that time, as also down at the 'Black Dog' at Bedfont, one of the meeting-places of the Driving Club.

From a day-coach I was draughted into one of the mails, still working out of London, and as there were about half-a-dozen of them starting from Piccadilly every night, there was usually a crowd to see us off—the Bristol, Bath, Exeter, Gloucester, Southampton, and, though last not least, the crack Devonport, usually known as the 'Quicksilver.' From the coach office in the city we went quietly up to Piccadilly, where the loading the passengers' luggage was completed, and we waited the arrival of our guard, who came up from the General Post

Office with the bags and firearms, consisting of a blunderbuss and a brace of pistols, carried for the protection of the mailbags. He was brought up from the General Post Office in a large sort of box, nearly square, on a pair of wheels, and with one horse. This plan was adopted, as it enabled him to get through the streets much more quickly in this one-horse cart than he could on the mail-coach with four horses.

To cram the hind boot with letters and newspaper bags, jumping on them to get them in, and strapping some on the roof of the mail, did not occupy very long, when off we went down to the first change at Hounslow. Eight passengers, with coachman, guard, luggage, and mailbags, was not very light, but, as I found out later in life, was not such a heavy load as some of the coaches I had to work in. Altogether, the position had some advantages over the day-coaches' work. When running out of London we did not start till after eight at night, and on our return reached Piccadilly between five and six in the morning, so that in summer we always worked in the cool and did not get in for the underground sleeping in London at all, the rest horses and any changes in our team being always at the stables at Hounslow.

Before finishing the account of my work in the mail, I will endeavour to give some description of the King's birthday, so far as concerned the mails.

Every year, on the King's birthday, all the mails running out of London were paraded in Lincoln's Inn Fields. There were, I suppose, about twenty-five four-horse and two pair-horse mails, viz., the Hastings and Brighton. For the occasion, all the coaches were either newly-painted or varnished, the harness of all the horses, which were picked teams, was new, the reins especially looking very fresh; coachmen's and guards' uniforms—red coats and gold bands round their hats—were on for the first time; and flowers or rosettes in the horses' heads left nothing wanting to give to each a handsome turn-out. In the rear of the procession were the mailcarts which conveyed the guards of the west-country mails from the General Post Office to Piccadilly. I am not quite sure whether the twopenny-postboys brought up the rear. They were, however, boys who rode on ponies or galloways, in red jackets, with a leather portmanteau behind them, containing the letters and papers for towns about twelve miles from London, viz., Croydon, Romford, Waltham, etc. The whole turn-out of the birthday was quite a sight of the year, and crowds came to look at it. The letter-bags of that period were nothing like those of the present day—the penny postage having so multiplied letters that the mails of my day could not have conveyed a tithe, or I suppose



a hundredth part, of the letters and papers of the present day.

The movements in the life of a coach horse, like the cow's tail, were downwards ; so that you commenced when young and fresh to work out of London in a crack day-coach, from which you were transferred into a mail or night-coach out of London, or moved down to the second stage out of London in the day-coach. Then you got put into the night coach, and eventually got down on to the ' middle ground ' in the mail or night-coach, where you got about used up. Having gone through the various gradations, I will give some of my experiences.

Working in the mail at night, where time was bound to be kept, often entailed very great exertion, but it was known to a nicety by the proprietors and coachmen what each horse in each team could do : so that it was very soon found whether you were really able to do your share of work in the mail, and if not, you were taken out and put somewhere where time need not be so strictly kept, or the pace was slower.

The conversations which took place at the end of the stages between the coachmen and horse-keepers in the dead of the night were very short and to the purpose, there not being much time to spare ; and I often heard them after this style :—

Coachman: 'This off-wheeler's a little lame, Jemmy; rest her the up-journey to-morrow morning, and put in the old black horse; work the chestnut mare up near leader.'

Horsekeeper (putting to): 'This old grey horse got rubbed with the collar up last journey. He won't be able to work again. You must ask the guv'nor to send down a rest horse.'

At another stage it would be—

Horsekeeper: 'I've put a collar on the lamp-iron, it do want a bit of stuffin' put in. The old brown mare's shoulder be raw with it.'

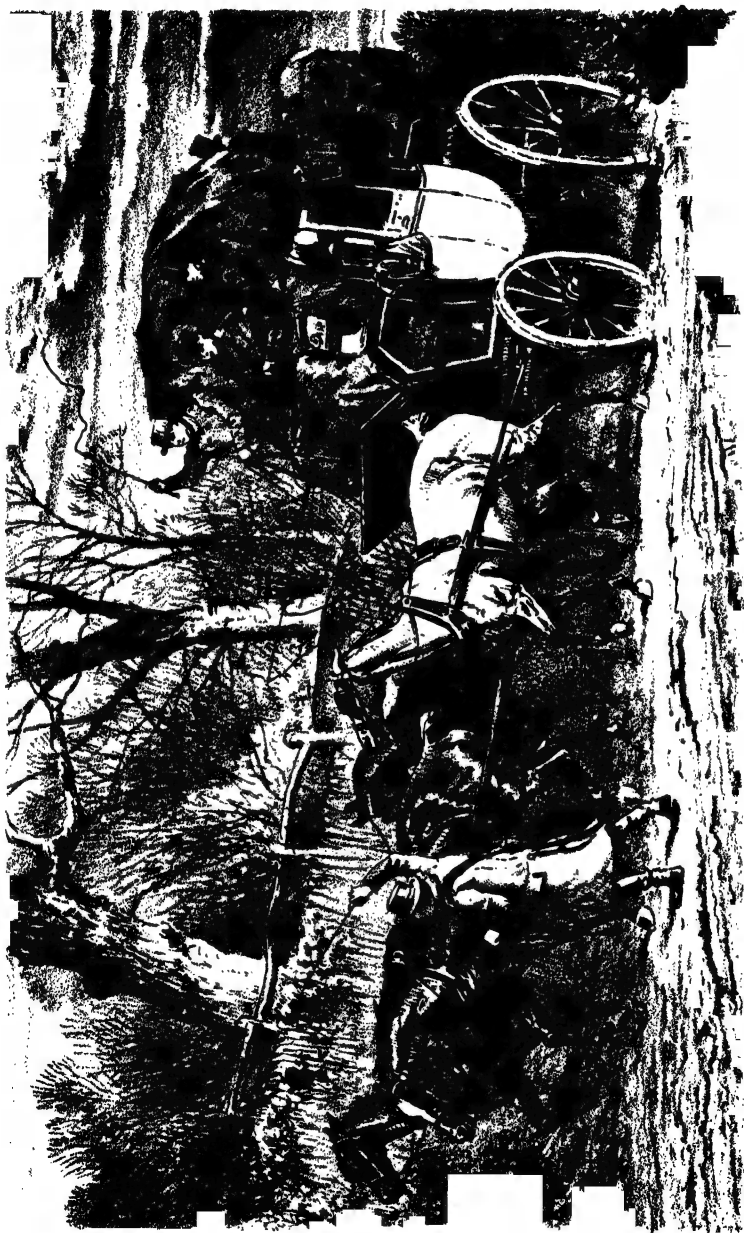
Coachman: 'Put this little bay mare near leader next journey up, and put this near wheeler down to the bottom bar.'

Then as the coachman was just getting up it would be from the horsekeeper—

'I've hung the oil-can on the lamp-iron, if you'll get it filled and bring 'un down to-morrow night.'

If the mail with only four outside, and coachman and guard, was a good load, what was the night-coach, with twelve out, four in, coachman, guard, large fore and hind boots full, about four or five feet of luggage on the roof, the iron loaded as high as the crown of the guard's hat with luggage; and lastly, the 'pig net,' which was a net hung on the off-side of the hind boot by loops of strong

cord attached to the irons of the back seats, and to rings in the top of that boot—it was filled with baskets of fish and game! Such a load might often come down of a night, but worse than this was ‘Magazine nights’ as they were called. These were the last night of every month, when all the ‘Blackwoods,’ ‘Frasers,’ ‘Bentleys,’ and other monthly periodicals were sent out of London down into the country; the day-coaches, of course, would not take them, so it fell to the lot of us poor unfortunate workers in the night-coaches to carry them. Huge bundles of damp paper compressed together as tightly as possible, are not the lightest packages in the world, and as many of these as could possibly be loaded on to the coach had to be carried. The work on these nights, and especially with heavy roads in the winter, was awful, and then the ‘short tommy’ or ‘docker,’ was freely used—not, however, that it was used only on ‘Magazine nights,’ as many of us could testify from practical experience. The ‘short tommy,’ or ‘short docker,’ was never used on day-coaches, and was more used than seen on night-coaches. For the enlightenment of the uninitiated, I may as well describe it. As a general definition I do not know that I can do better than say it was a species of pig whip, or such as is frequently seen in the hands of low horsedealers at a country fair, or Smithfield





on a Friday afternoon among horse copers and chaunters. It was proof against any amount of hitting, and nothing would break it, while in the hands of a strong man it would get the last step out of you as long as you could move one leg before another. When the road was bad, the load heavy, the horses not up to their work, and time rather behind, then the instrument came into play, and whether you were doing your share of the work or not, if the coach was not getting on at the right pace, you were sure to get it pretty hot ; in fact, it was the maxim once laid down by an old and experienced coachman under similar circumstances, 'Hit them as can work ; it's no use to hit them as can't !'

Up hills the 'short tommy' was generally resorted to. Putting his ordinary whip under him, the coachman would have the 'short tommy' from the guard, who carried it in his horn-basket, and lay into us wheelers much more severely than he could with his double thong, and while he was letting us have it, the guard, if we were barely out of a walk, would probably be running by the leaders, giving it to them with a chain-trace strap and buckle out of his tool-box, or an ash stick. To keep us going was the great thing, and as our hides were generally as hard as boards, and there was no soft flesh on our bones, I suppose it took a

great deal to make us feel much. I never found our coachman adopt the plan of the one on the Exeter mail. One night, when his horses were struggling in a snowdrift, and pretty well beaten, he shouted out to the guard, 'Blow the horn, Churchill! and they'll think they've come to the change, and will pull through.' Not a bad dodge, but how far successful I don't know.

Having got fairly down on to the middle-ground at night work, and been coaching for some years, I now stood over considerably, and was very tottery on the fore legs, as proved one night when we had just begun to descend a long hill with a heavy load. The drag had been put on, breaks not being in use on coaches in those days, and we were going at a steady trot, when somehow or other down I went, all of a heap. This was a memorable event in my life, as it entitled me to wear the 'postmaster's coat of arms' for the remainder of my days, without any expense being incurred at the Herald's College in finding the arms. I was now obliged to be the rest horse for about three weeks, and during that time had ample opportunity to think about all that I saw going on around me, the state of the stables, harness, &c. I may as well give the result of my cogitation and observations. I stood in a stable with four others, that would answer to the following descriptions :

1. A rakish-looking chestnut mare, with greasy heels, and hind legs very much swollen—almost as big as her body.

2. A grey old horse, bearing the ‘postmaster’s coat of arms,’ fired on both hocks.

3. A rusty-brown sort of old mare, fired all round, or, as the sailors would say, ‘fore-and-aft.’

4. A game old chestnut horse, with scarcely a leg to stand on.

5. Myself.

The following remarks would apply to pretty well all of us:—Knees broken; in fact, I don’t know whether there were any in the stable that were not; hair rubbed off the withers by the collar, holding back heavy loads down hill. All either had sores under the collar or pad, or else patches where they had healed up and the hair had not grown again. Eyes—some with one, some almost without; I question if there were six really good ones among the lot of us. Bodies—Ribs well developed, hip and back bones ditto, the latter particularly comfortable for the horsekeeper when he rode us to and from the blacksmith’s for shoeing. Breed—good in all of us, and showed, notwithstanding our general disreputable appearance. There was an unmistakable look of go in us, and proofs of our having seen better days. Legs, frightfully screwy and dilapidated, broken knees, standing over, fired,



swollen, scars, from one leg knocking against the shoe of another foot. I believe, if sent to the hammer at a place where we were not known, about forty pounds would have bought the lot of us, if not more.

Our stable was an old wooden building on one side of a yard adjoining the coach road. When it was built I will not pretend to say. It was covered with lichen, and had that grey, venerable appearance seen in old farm-buildings; in fact, it was a sort of shed; the thatch was all moss-covered, and had evidently been on many years, the stable inside was open to the thatch, there being no loft or boarding over our heads, the space being thickly covered with cobwebs and dust, which had never been disturbed since the shed was built. A manger running the whole length of it: some upright posts on which our harness was hung, and bales to divide us from each other; a couple of old, worn-down birch brooms, a currycomb, a scraper, an oil-can and brush, and pitchfork, a corn-bin, a twitch, and an ash-stick comprised, I believe, all the fittings and furniture of the stable. I don't know any epithet I can apply to it better than styling it the road casual ward, and ourselves the occupants, harmonising with the human casualties that usually frequent such places.





Never appearing in daylight, there was no chance of any member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals hauling up our master for working us when lame, or with sore shoulders, or wretchedly poor and weak. The food, so far as it went, was not much to be complained of, but the allowance was very short. Our master only looked to making his horsing the coaches pay, so that to accomplish his object we must be kept at as little expense as possible. A coach would often pay the end men very well, but be little better than a losing concern to the men who covered the middle ground.

As I have mentioned the several articles kept in the stable, I may as well mention what use was made of them.

When we came out of the coach after the stage, with tails quivering, sides heaving, heavy blowing, and nostrils distended, as soon as the coach was off again we were walked into the stable, where our harness was taken off, and our grub put into the manger. We might get a scrape down to take some of the mud and sweat off, or if the horsekeeper was short of time to get the horses ready for the next coach up or down, or wanted to get into his bed, we were left till the morning, when one after another we were tied up outside the stable, and either currycombed over

or scrubbed with the old birch broom, so as to rub all the dirt and dust off, and then just wiped over with a damp piece of an old rug or hayband. This constituted our daily and only grooming, so it may be guessed our coats were by no means smooth and satiny, but were tolerably long and shaggy. Indeed, I was somewhat like the tee-totaller who—

When the winter came on, his great-coat he looked thin in it ;  
He still swallowed water without any gin in it.

The very last stage in the work of some coach horses, although it never came to my lot, was to work in the forage-van. When on the upper ground in the London day-coaches, I often used to see it come to our stables. It was a light sort of waggon, uncovered, and with a seat for the driver which looked very much like an old coach-box. It was mounted up in front, after the manner of a Great Northern coal-waggon of the present day. The wheels were old coach-wheels, frequently odd ones—two red, perhaps, and two yellow. The van was laden with sacks of provender, being the corn, chaff, and hay, all mixed together, and being the allowance left periodically at the different stables down the road for the horses standing there. The van was drawn by four old coach horses, and went just at a trot or occasionally a walk, as the old cripples could

manage. The leader-bars, like the wheels, were frequently odd—one yellow and two red, or blue and red, as the case might be. The driver was a sort of stableyard man, who might be dressed in the discarded great-coat of some guard or coachman, from whom he had begged it; and his whip an old one, which had been broken and spliced in three or four places. The whole turn-out looked venerable and seedy in the extreme, and bore evident marks of having come down in the world. After having delivered all the provender down the road, the van might be seen returning to London just out of a walk, with a generally melancholy demeanour pervading the whole concern.

Having done duty in the forage-van, there was but one more stage in the life of a stage-coach horse, which was usually to the kennels of some of the packs down the road he had been travelling, and thus would end the career of many a near-wheeler.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEW AND THE OLD COACHES





## CHAPTER VII.

COACHING, as it was the principal mode of transit from one place to another throughout the country, was as different from the coaching of the present day as can well be imagined, bearing in mind that this similarity existed between each ; namely, that a coach was used, and that it was drawn by four horses. In the old days coaching *was* a matter of business and a necessity ; to-day, it *is* a matter of amusement only. It *was* carried on as a source of profit and livelihood ; it *is* carried on almost irrespective of the pecuniary results. It *was* carried on all the year round, in all weathers, day and night ; it *is* carried on only during the summer season in the day. The distances extended several hundred miles—as from London to Devonport, Milford Haven, Glasgow, or Edinburgh ; in the present day, it does not exceed fifty-two miles, from London to Brighton. The coaches, besides being full not only outside but in, were loaded with as much luggage as could be crammed on to and into them, which, for fifteen or sixteen

passengers, was no slight weight; they seldom *are* full out and inside, and perhaps the luggage of all the passengers only consists of their sticks and umbrellas. In fact, it might generally be said of the passengers, as a man said in a cart, containing about eight persons besides himself, with a miserable horse to draw them, 'Go on, Bill! we all on us got sticks.' I have pointed out some of the dissimilarities between the old and new coaching systems, but do not for a moment wish to say anything in disparagement of the 'turns out' of the present day, which for their workmanlike appearance and get-up are highly creditable to those who have the management of them. Many horses could have been picked out of the stables of Messrs. Chaplin, Sherman, Nelson, or Horne, quite equal to the average of the horses that have been working the coaches during the past season. The horses, however, were much more valuable than those used in the 'old coaches,' as is shown by the prices they realised at the hammer reaching three figures, which very few of the horses in the 'old coaches' would have done. Here, however, it must be borne in mind that the horses used in the coaches of the present day have most likely been hunted all the winter, and then at the end of the season come into the coaches. Such horses of course sell after the coach stops with a character

as hunters, and being all the better for having been kept in exercise during the summer, they are therefore almost in hunting condition when sold out of the coach—this adds several pounds to their value. The coaching work they have been doing can scarcely be called hard, seeing that their loads have not been excessive, and the number of them to do it has been ample. There has been no stint of food, or hard living, with indifferent grooming, so often the lot of the horses in the ‘old coaches.’ The number sold out of each coach has, I think, exceeded a horse a mile, so they were amply horsed.

Punctually keeping the time of five and a half hours from Brighton has been considered as somewhat of a feat, but the fast Brighton coaches all did it in five hours—the ‘Times,’ the ‘Vivid,’ the ‘Age,’ &c. None of the coaches used to take more than six, except the mail, which was pair-horsed, and ran at night, leaving Brighton about half-past eleven, and reaching the General Post Office about six in the morning, as I know from having once had, as a matter of necessity, to perform the journey on it. It was a beautiful moonlight night in the summer; about six passengers with the coachman and guard. We came to a long hill, where all got down to walk up, and, by way of amusement, some one proposed a game at

leapfrog, in which we all joined except the coachman, who had to take care of the mail and horses. The guard was in his usual red coat, and gold band round his hat, and came flying over our backs, when, having cleared the lot, he set up a back, and we all went over him. Arrived at the top of the hill, we mounted the mail again, and continued our journey. One night's travelling through the country with a pair of horses is quite enough,—with four it is a very different thing.

It may be interesting to see a copy of an old coaching bill which not many years since I saw hanging up in the coffee-room of the 'Black Swan' at York, and for anything I know to the contrary may be there still.

The bill is a curiosity, and contrasts strongly with those which were issued about 130 years afterwards, when coaching was in its zenith. The time when the coach of 1706 would start from or arrive at any particular place was a matter of some uncertainty, or, as some one has liberally translated the following line,

*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit,*

'No mortal knows what hour the omnibus starts.'

Here is the coaching bill of 1706 :—

## YORK FOUR DAYS STAGE COACH.

*Begins on Friday, the 12th of April, 1706.*

All that are desirous to pass from London to York, or from York to London, or any other place on that road, Let them Repair to the Black Swan in Houlbourn in London, and to the Black Swan in Coney Street, in York.

At both which Places they may be received in a Stage Coach Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, which performs the whole journey in four days (if God permits), And Sets forth at Five in the morning.

And returns from York to Stamford in two days and from Stamford by Huntingdon to London in two days more. And the like stages on their return.

Allowing each passenger 14lb. weight and all over 3*d*. a pound.

Performed by { BENJAMIN KINGMAN,  
HENRY HARRISON,  
WALTER BAYNES.

Also this gives Notice that Newcastle Stage Coach sets out from York every Monday and Friday and from Newcastle every Monday and Friday.

Recd. in pt 0500 0 of Mr. Bodingfold for 5 places for Mondy the 3 of June, 1706.

The two last lines were in manuscript, the rest of the bill being printed, with capital letters where they appear in the above to the different words, and the bill ~~was~~ about the size of a sheet of ordinary note-paper when open.

This is rather different from the time of the London and Edinburgh mail, which in 1836 did

the whole distance from there to London, 400 miles, in forty-five hours and a half, being timed throughout at more than nine miles and a half an hour, exclusive of stoppages for meals and official work. From London to York it was allowed twenty hours to do the 197 miles.

These were certainly wonderful old days, when coaches were brought through dark nights in all sorts of weather, and with several different coachmen to work them, and arrived at the yard of the General Post Office, St. Martin's-le-Grand, punctually almost to a minute, the mail guards having to deliver in their timepieces with the bills and time marked on them, and the want of due punctuality on the part of any contractor was sure to be detected, and he was pretty sharply looked up by his partners, as the mail was bound to arrive at the General Post Office at the correct time, and any time lost over one contractor's ground had to be made up among the others by additional work out of their horses. One night on the mail a coachman on the middle-ground, who stammered very much, was considerably put out by the man on the upper-ground bringing it down a little late, which entailed upon the stammerer the necessity of making up some time over his own ground. I gathered from his observations that this frequently occurred, while if he was late with the mail on

the up journey the upper-ground man kicked up a row.

As he bustled up on to his box and got off with a quick start, the stammerer thus addressed me :

‘ They ex-p-p-p-p-pect me to k-k-k-k-keep t-t-t-t-t-time up, but d-d-d-d-d-devil a b-b-b-b-bit do they b-b-b-b-b-bring any t-t-t-t-t-time down ! ’

If there is a vast difference between the old and new coaches, how much greater is it in the mail department. When carried by the mail coaches, a letter going about 100 miles would be charged ninepence or tenpence, and the number of letters arriving in London for six days by all the morning mails, and despatched by the evening mails, was about 39,000, or about 6,000 to be taken out each night by the night mails, about twenty-five in number, together with newspapers ; in those days there were no daily penny papers.

Though timed at a higher speed than the mails, Mr. Chaplin was of opinion that the day-coaches could not match the mails, or keep the time they did even through the winter, and as he justly observed, it was no speed if not kept punctually. This was pretty good authority from a man who horsed thirteen or fourteen mails out of London, and a large number of coaches, and he had several hundred horses engaged in his coaching business. Horne, Waterhouse, and Sherman, kept about the



same number, and their London horses, I believe, they used to reckon at 35*l.* to 40*l.* apiece.

The subjoined table will show the time allowed to some of the fastest day-coaches out of London, and the mails, and the distances they respectively travelled :—

	Miles	Hours
Mail from London to Manchester . . .	185	19
'Telegraph' Day Coach „ . . .	185	18½
London and Exeter Mail . . .	176	19
London and Exeter 'Telegraph' Day Coach .	165	17
London and Holyhead Mail . . .	250	27
London and Devonport Mail . . .	216	21
The 'Wonder' Day Coach to Shrewsbury .	158	15½
London and Bristol . . .	121	11½

The 'Defiance,' Captain Barclay's coach from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, was said to be the fastest and best conducted coach to be found in the three kingdoms. It was timed to perform the whole journey, 129 miles, in twelve hours, which perhaps was almost as great a feat as the celebrated proprietor performed when he walked 1,000 miles in 1,000 hours.

Coaching business must have been very well managed in the 'wonderful old times,' and considerable capital employed, and ability and energy displayed in the conduct of it. The business turn-outs of those days might not perhaps quite come up to the amateur ones of the present day, but they were admirable, and reflected much credit on those to whom they belonged.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME MORE ABOUT THE VERY OLD  
COACHES



## CHAPTER VIII.

I HAVE ridden on a coach when a road was cut through the snow, which was as high as the roof of the coach on each side. One year when the country was in this state, I was about eleven hours on a coach, performing the journey from London to Oxford. True, it was the day before Christmas, when of course the coach was loaded with game and turkey baskets, oyster-barrels, and other presents which are usually flying about the country at that season. Every coach on the road was hours behind its time, and I believe we met the 'Paul Pry' Worcester night-coach, which ought to have been in London before seven o'clock in the morning, about five o'clock in the afternoon some thirty miles from town. Every place on the coach was covered with baskets, besides game and turkeys hung on to the different irons on the coach, and, as was the invariable practice a day or so before Christmas, not a passenger was on the coach. There was just room for the guard to sit

down; the rates charged for baskets and parcels paid better than if the seats had been filled with passengers.

The coach by which I was travelling—I being, if I am not mistaken, the only passenger—of course, like all the others, was hours behind its time, and got into Oxford somewhere about ten or eleven at night. I was going to spend the Christmas with a relative who was an undergraduate at St. John's, and whose official duties detained him at Oxford. Having, as he supposed, seen the last London coach in, he returned to college and turned in to bed, where I found him. Hungry and thirsty after my journey, I wanted some supper, but the college buttery having been closed some hours, I had no alternative but to cater for myself elsewhere. I accordingly sallied out into the town, where I bought a half-quartern loaf and some cold ham, with which I returned to college, when my friend turned out of bed, and we managed to make ourselves very comfortable, and wound up with a pipe previously to going to roost.

An accident happened one year to Nelson's Exeter coach, the 'Defiance,' on the up journey, when laden with baskets and hampers a day or two before Christmas. There were four or five passengers in the front part of the coach, but all

the hind part was crammed with Christmas parcels. They had just started from the change with six horses, when a leader, turning restive, swerved, and over went the coach—baskets, hampers, passengers and all, without, however, any serious damage except to one gentleman, who had his arm broken. Charles Dickens's father was on the coach, which reached the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, some ten or twelve hours after its proper time.

I remember one particularly severe winter with very heavy fall of snow, drifted in some places to such a depth that all the coaches and mails were entirely stopped. Mailbags which ought to have been brought into London by the mails by six o'clock in the morning arrived at all sorts of times during the day or evening, and I am not sure in some instances that it was not the following day; the guard, having taken the leaders off the mail, strapped the bags across one of them, while he rode the other, going across the fields, floundering through snow-drifts covering hedges, and getting over the country the best way he could. Some of the men reached London in a very exhausted state, having been out many hours engaged in the laborious work which, much to their credit, they got through only by great energy and perseverance. Whether they received any extra remuneration for these additional services I don't know, but it may

perhaps surprise some of my readers to learn that the regular pay of a mail guard, and all that he received from the Government, was his uniform—coat, waistcoat, and hat, with the munificent sum of *ten shillings and sixpence a week*, an amount, of course, on which he could not have lived, if it had been unsupplemented by the fees he received from the passengers. For a man who was out all night on the mail, winter and summer, for twelve hours at a stretch, two nights out of three, the pay, I should apprehend, was less than that of any other public officer connected with the General Post Office, to say nothing of his responsibility and onerous duties involving the care, punctual taking-up and delivering the letter-bags at all the different towns and villages along the road. Having to assist in changing horses and keep the mail punctually to time, it will be seen he had not much opportunity of getting a snooze for any length of time. Unlike the coachman, whose work was only about five hours consecutively, the guard's lasted for twelve or more, there being only one guard on each side of the journey, that is, one up and one down, for any mail that went only about one hundred miles, as to Norwich, Yarmouth, Bristol, Bath, Southampton, or Portsmouth. On those that went longer distances there were two, three, or four men on each side, a man's journey taking

him from eight o'clock at night, when he left the General Post Office, till nearly the same hour the next morning. His facilities for getting refreshment during his work were about on a par with his pay, as the mails did not stop twenty minutes as the coaches did, and what little time they were in a town he was generally engaged with his official duties. I won't be sure, by-the-bye, whether, in addition to the pay and uniform, the Post Office provided the guard with a horn. If it did I rather think it was the common tin, which was the regulation instrument. I am quite certain that the long nicely-made copper and brass horns they used to have, with German silver mouthpieces, were provided by themselves. The Post Office did not even provide a horn-basket, the only contrivance for carrying it being a leathern loop nailed on to the panel of the coach, which left the horn wholly uncovered and fully exposed to being plastered with the mud from the off hind wheel.

Although the mail guard's official pay was so low, I don't think the service was objected to, as the mails, from their fares being rather higher than the coaches, generally carried those who did not care paying a trifle and being a little liberal to the coachmen and guards. A full load—four inside and as many out—at not less than half-a-crown a head, probably, together with sums received for



executing little commissions for persons in the towns on the road, and the occasional short fares, divided between coachman and guard, made the amount received at the end of the week not to be despised. A man had, moreover, a good deal of time on his hands in the day, in which he could amuse himself or transact the little matters of business entrusted to him. The mails ran every night, but inasmuch as bags were not despatched from London on Sunday nights, in the journey-work, so far as sorting and looking after bags was concerned, he had an easier time of it.

The little seat he occupied was not an uncomfortable one, and he had this advantage, that when he had a chance of getting a sleep over a ten-mile stage, there was no one behind to bother, or keep him awake by talking.

In addition to the copy of the old coaching bill of the London and York coach in 1706, I came across two quaint old advertisements of an earlier date, namely, in 1658. One happens to relate to the same road, and shows that from 1658 to 1706 there was not much progress made in accelerating the coaches, as each advertisement states that the coach will perform the journey from London to Edinburgh, or *vice versa*, in four days.

The other advertisement is, I think, very interesting, as showing the mode of transit adopted

by our ancestors, and adopted, I take it, very generally—that is to say, the saddle. On those occasions, it would appear, a man set out on a long journey, of some hundred and fifty or two hundred miles on horseback, changing at the various stages in the same way as the coaches. He carried with him, I presume, one of those little leather cases, strapped on either in front or at the back of his saddle, which I have seen frequently in use. They would hold little more than what old Napier described as being all that a man need carry with him when travelling, namely, ‘a toothbrush and a piece of soap,’ probably a *sac de nuit* might also be crammed in, but what would be the state of the front of a day shirt, especially one with the frills and ruffles which our ancestors rejoiced in, may be easily imagined. By-the-bye, I rather think that in addition to the little leather case, large saddlebags were sometimes carried, somewhat similar, only smaller, than those carried by the pack-horses, and a picture of which may be seen on some of the old signboards at inns called ‘The Packhorse.’

Observe the strides which have taken place in locomotion. In 1658 a man starts to ride on horseback from London to Edinburgh. How long it took him to perform the journey I have no record, but the coach took four days—travelling, I con-

clude, by day only. In 1836, the mail performed the journey in forty-five hours and a half, and in 1876 the North-Western and Great Northern will whisk you down in about nine hours and a half.

When railways were being first introduced, Stephenson stated before a committee of the House of Commons, that he thought they might travel at twenty miles an hour, but he was afraid to name a greater speed, because he thought no one would give credence to his opinion. An engine-driver being once asked by Brunel if he would drive him in a train from London to Bristol in an hour, said, 'Yes, if he would provide for his wife and family in the event of an accident!'

I wonder what the 'good horses' in 1658 were like. There used to be an old couplet—

I've heard an experienced coachman say,  
It cost him more in whips than hay.

Coaches when first introduced, we read, were built without springs, in order that the jolting might keep the coachman awake.

The following is a specimen of the coaching arrangements now more than two hundred years since :—

From the 26 April 1658 there will continue to go Stage Coaches from the George Inn without Aldersgate London unto the several Cities and Towns for the rates and at the times hereafter mentioned and declared

Every Monday Wednesday and Friday

To Salisbury in two days for XXs & Exeter in four days for XIs—To York in four days for XIs

Once every fortnight to Edinburgh for IV-*l* apiece Monday

All persons who desire to travel into the Cities Towns & Roads herein hereafter mentioned & Expressly named to

(here follows a long list of places between London and Newcastle northwards and between London and Cornwall westward), 'let them repair to the George Inn at Holborn Bridge, London, and thence they shall be in good coaches with good horses upon every Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays at and for reasonable rates—1 April, 1658.'

The next advertisement, also dated in 1658, sets forth the facilities offered to all those who preferred the pigskin to the 'vehicular mode of conveyance.' Verily, our ancestors must have been tough old codgers.

All gentlemen, merchants, and others who have occasion to travel between London and Manchester, Manchester and Warrington, or any other town upon that road, for the accommodation of trade, despatch of business, and ease of purse, upon every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning, betwixt six and ten of the clock, at the house of Mr. Christopher Charteris, at the sign of the Hartshorn, in West Smithfield, and post-master there, and at the post-master of Chester, at the post-master of Manchester, and at the post-master of Warrington, may

have a good and able single horse or more furnished at threepence the mile, without the charge of a guide ; and so likewise at the house of Mr. Thomas Challenor, post-master at Stone, in Staffordshire, upon every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday morning to go for London. And so likewise at the several post-masters upon the road, who will have all such set days so many horses with furniture in readiness to furnish the riders without any stay to carry them to or from any the places aforesaid in four days, as well to London as from thence, and to places nearer in less time, according as their occasions shall require, they engaging at the first stage where they take horse for the safe delivery of the same to the next immediate stage, and not to ride that horse any further without consent of the post-master by whom he rides, and so from stage to stage to their journey's end. All those who intend to ride this way are desired to give a little notice beforehand, if conveniently they can, to the general post-master where they first take horse, whereby they may be furnished with so many horses as the riders shall require with expedition.

The subjoined advertisement shows that in those days the mails were occasionally robbed, and that the blunderbuss and brace of pistols which each mail guard used to carry with him as long as mails continued on the road were not quite useless appendages—at all events in the year 1658.

Whereas Mr. Herbert Jones, attorney-at-law in the town of Monmouth, well known by being several years together under-sheriff of the same county, hath of late divers times robbed the mail coming from that town to.

London, and taken out divers letters and writs, and is now fled from justice, &c.

I think there seem to have been some 'wonderful old times' as regards travelling from 1658 up to the time when railways superseded coaches. In fact, I might say that the very old times seem to have been more wonderful still.

I only know, of my own personal knowledge, of one instance of an attack on a coach or coachman on the road, and that occurred when the Great Western Railway was in course of construction. A lot of the navvies engaged on the Box Tunnel wanted to get up on to one of the night-coaches. If I remember rightly, it was one of Miss Fro-mont's, the new Company, driven by a man rejoicing in the euphonious name of Stubbings. He objected, and the coach having no guard, he was without assistance, and was very much knocked about and maltreated in consequence. A somewhat similar attempt was made on a coach on which I was coming up from Brighton at the time the Brighton Railway was being made. We were about Red Hill, and it was just getting dusk when a huge navvy ran after the coach, and succeeded in getting hold of the top rail of the back seat. I was the only passenger behind, and must confess did not feel particularly comfortable, when greatly to my relief, the rail, which, I suppose, was broken

before, gave way, and down went the navvy into the road. The coachman knew nothing of it, so of course kept on, and I need scarcely say I did not wish him to stop. I was only too glad to let the navvy depart in peace.

If there is in the present day a laudable desire on the part of the proprietors to see their coaches well loaded, it was much more so in the days when coaching was a business on which the proprietors depended for their living, and the profits were the main, and in most instances the only point considered. Persons were obliged to travel by the coaches as the only, or at all events the general mode of conveyance, and as on all roads where there was any amount of traffic, there were several coaches running, it became necessary for the proprietors of each coach to set forth some inducement to patronise theirs. Accordingly the times of starting or arrival, the stoppages for meals, the time in which the journey was performed, and the lowness of the fares were all set forth in the most favourable terms in the advertisements and on the coach bills to attract custom to each particular establishment. The style of some of these productions was very original, and the older ones very quaint. They would not be of much service as models to the proprietors who are about issuing the cards of their coaches for the present season, but I subjoin one of the year 1818, in which the

innkeeper certainly has displayed some ingenuity in the variety of the recommendations of his various coaches. One is almost led to suppose that he must have had a secretary, or some one whose duty it was to prepare his coach bills—in fact a sort of coaching ‘George Robins,’ whose flowery advertisements as an auctioneer in bygone days many persons will still remember.

#### WOOD’S OFFICES FOR TRAVELLING.

*Reindeer and Ram Inns, High Street, Doncaster.*

Coaches the best. No racing. Horses keep good time. Richard Wood thanks his numerous friends for the distinguished preference given to his conveyances, and respectfully informs them that he has made great additions to his coaching business, having much extended his concerns, and altered the hours of setting out for the better accommodation of travelling, of which the following is a correct statement.

#### LONDON.

The Rockingham light and elegant coach (carries only four inside). This is a favourite coach, and so well-known that no comment is necessary.

#### LONDON.

Prince Regent Coach (carries four inside only). Notwithstanding the uncommon expedition of this coach, it is allowed to be the most safe and pleasant conveyance.

#### LONDON.

Lord Nelson Coach.—Passengers being fatigued, may stop on the road and proceed on the following day, without any additional fare.



## LONDON.

Highflyer.—This is a favourite coach, being the oldest upon the road, and allowed to be one of the safest and best travelling coaches, and the only one through Hertford, Hoddesdon, etc.

## SHEFFIELD.

Defiance Coach.—The Defiance is a most elegant coach, fitted up for the accommodation of ladies who prefer riding outside. Very expeditious and very safe.

## HULL.

Rodney Post Coach.—This coach is very much improved in expedition, and the fares so considerably reduced, that calculating the certainty of arriving at Hull and Doncaster, it is superior to any water conveyance.

## NOTTINGHAM.

Royal Forester.—This is the only coach on the above road. Carries four inside; and a very pleasant conveyance.

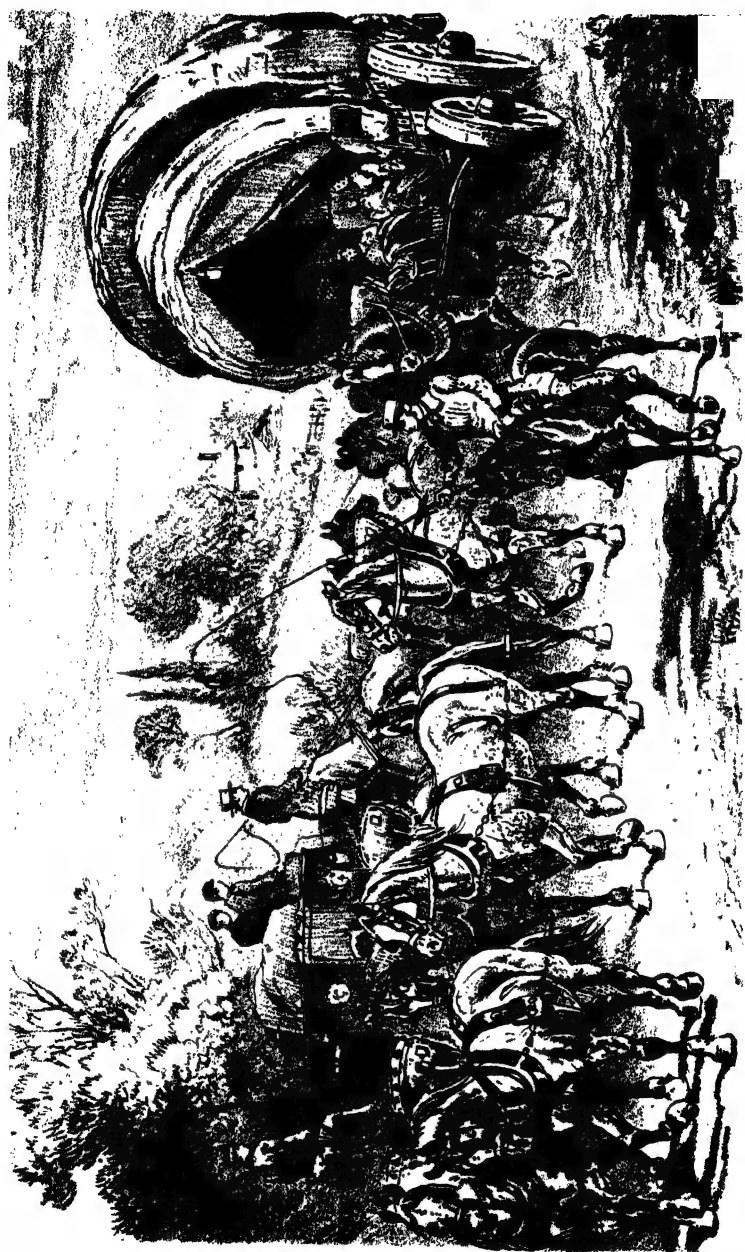
## LINCOLN.

Lord Nelson Coach.—This is the only coach upon the above road, and opens a communication to all parts of Lincolnshire.

## HEAVY LUGGAGE.

Jackson's old-established waggon set out every morning, and arrive at the Bull and Mouth in four days.

This, I presume, was the old broad-wheeled waggon—wheels about ten inches broad in the tire, and worked by eight or ten horses, and constituting the conveyance of poor persons having to move any distance from one part of the country to





another. If not travelling more than four miles an hour, these waggons could carry passengers, without incurring any excise duty for license or mileage; and you might frequently see a group of women and children sitting in front under the tilted cover, and looking very snug and cozy. What they used to pay by way of fare I don't know, but probably much about the same as in the 'Parliamentary' of the present day. They, however, went at a pace under four miles an hour, while the 'Parliamentary' goes over twenty. A picturesque object was the old stage waggon on the road, with the bells on the harness of the leading horses, and frequently the driver in his smock-frock riding by the side on a small pony, with his long waggoner's whip, a horn lantern hanging up in front, to be lighted when night came on. In a light soil, and when the weather was very dry, these old waggons kicked up a wonderful dust; eight or ten heavy horses, with the large, broad wheels, it may be imagined, would raise a considerable cloud. A coach, of course, was soon out of it, unless you had to stop behind the waggon for something else to pass.



CHAPTER IX.

ON THE LONDON AND BRISTOL ROAD



## CHAPTER IX.

AMONG other crack coaches out of London was the 'Peveril of the Peak,' to Manchester. It ran from the 'Blossoms Inn,' Lawrence Lane, now pulled down, and forming the site of handsome warehouses and offices. It was driven out of London by George Wild, whom I knew well, and was frequently coming in contact with on matters of business long after the 'Peveril' had stopped, until nearly the time of his death—a few years since. After he left the North road he drove for some time out of London on one of the Bristol coaches, and he subsequently had a short coach out of London of his own. After that he kept a public-house at a village on the London and Birmingham road. I need scarcely say he was a first-rate coachman, and could bring a coach out of the 'Swan with Two Necks' yard, in Lad Lane, as neatly as any man I ever saw. The 'Royal Bruce' (which he also drove at one time) and the 'Defiance' were Chaplin's coaches, and the 'Red Rover,' one of



Nelson's, from the 'Belle Sauvage,' Ludgate Hill. There were at night slow, heavy coaches as there were in the day. Every day-coach to Birmingham was not a 'Wonder,' 'Tallyho,' or 'Tantivy'; every day-coach to Cheltenham a 'Berkeley Hunt;' or every day-coach to Bath or Brighton a 'York House' or 'Age;' so every night-coach to Exeter was not a Nelson's 'Defiance' or Sherman's 'Subscription.' For instance, there was the 'Traveller' from Fagg's, the 'Bell and Crown,' Holborn, carrying *six* insides, and doing what is styled in theatrical parlance the 'heavy work.'

It used to be a saying on the road that anything that could gallop would do for a mailer. So with the coaches, anything that could go was put in; and the coaches maintained their great rate of speed throughout the night only by great exertions and good coachmanship, and not at a uniform pace.

There were stages of all lengths, from four or say five miles to nine or ten; and horses that could gallop an up-and-down stage of the former distance with scarcely a leg to stand on could not have worked through the long and perhaps hilly stage of the latter.

On the subject of the screws that used to be put into coaches, I may mention what I have seen, and for the accuracy of which I can therefore vouch. While waiting for a coach to come up to

the change, the horsekeeper led out one of the leaders, very groggy on his forelegs, and so stiff that he could hardly move. He was harnessed and all ready, and walked about till the coach came up, so as to enable him to make a bit of a start when put to.

As another instance, I was on a three-horsed mail, running from Hereford to Gloucester, where such an inveterate kicker was put in leader that, to prevent the possible chance of a rein or anything touching her back, her reins were passed through two iron rings attached for the purpose to each end of the leader-bar ; crupper, of course, she had none. She carried her head well, ran up to her bit, and did her full share of the work ; but directly it came to anything like a pull up or slackening of the pace, there was a most vigorous and ominous whisking of the short tail, indicating that with a very slight provocation she would, as they say, ‘kick a town down ;’ or, as the hackney coachman said of one of his horses, ‘he kicks fit to break ’is ’eart, but he aint wishous.’

This reminds me of the late Mr. Cooper, or, as he was familiarly called by the coachmen and guards down the road, ‘Tommy Cooper.’ Perhaps a few incidents connected with himself and his coaches may not be altogether devoid of interest. Few but those who were acquainted with the Bristol

and London road in its palmy days know who he was; but many knew him well as the courteous and obliging station-master on the South-Western Railway at Richmond, where he filled that post for many years after his coaches stopped, eventually retiring on a superannuation allowance; and I regretted to learn, on inquiring after him at Richmond a few years since, that he was no more.

He lived in coaching days at Thatcham, three miles on the London side of Newbury, which is half-way between London and Bristol. His residence was a snug cottage known as Cooper's Cottage. The up and down night-coaches stopped there twenty minutes to supper, and the up and down day-coaches stopped to dinner between one and two. Ample ranges of stabling were in the yard, which for four coaches with rest and other horses were necessarily considerable.

After travelling five or six hours on the coach, it was by no means an unpleasant change to go into the well-lighted room, with a good fire, and the long supper-table laid out for a full coach load of passengers numbering perhaps sixteen, with good substantial joints of cold beef, ham, pigeon-pie, &c., &c., and tea and coffee at each end.

You were generally ready to do your part of this middle-ground work, especially looking to the

certainly of your being unable to get anything more to eat or drink for some hours.

There was a good deal of fun about these little supper parties if you kept your eyes open to observe all that was going at the table.

I have alluded to the courteous and obliging demeanour of Mr. Cooper in his capacity of station-master at Richmond, but it was not the less so to his passengers when a coach proprietor at Thatcham—to ladies especially—as the following circumstance which just recurs to my memory will evince.

His day-coaches ran every day, including Sundays, and on one Sunday afternoon a lady having urgent occasion to reach London that evening, went to the Cottage intending to go on by the up coach, the last to London that afternoon. Mr. Cooper himself also was obliged to go to town, and intended to get on the coach, but on its arrival at the Cottage, it was full in and out. He accordingly resolved on driving up in his gig (the modern dogcart not then being in existence), a distance of fifty-two miles, after one o'clock in the afternoon. He intimated to the lady his intention, and expressed his willingness to drive her up if she liked to accompany him. Being most anxious to reach London, she assented, and they started in the gig with one of the coach horses out of his stable. In

this way he drove up to London, changing his horse at the different stables where the coaches changed, and no doubt having some put into his gig without knowing whether they were quiet, or indeed had even been in single harness before. He was, I believe, the originator of the system generally adopted on the Bristol road of 'no fees'—the coachmen and guards being all paid by the proprietors; and the words 'No fees' were painted on the backs of the coaches, and were also on the bills and in the advertisements.

The coaches which were running before I became acquainted with London were called 'Cooper's Old Company;' these words were on the back of the coach, above the hind boot. In opposition to his coach day and night, coaches were started on the same principle, and called 'The New Company.' These were slow coaches, carrying six inside, and much cheaper than any of the others on the road. Moreover, they had not any guards on the night-coaches, which, of course, on the 'no-fee' system, saved a good deal. What the exact fares were on this night-coach I cannot say, as it is so long since to state with any certainty; but I do recollect hearing that six Smithfield drovers, with their dogs, took the whole of the inside of the coach down from London one night after having got rid of all their beasts and sheep. At that time





there were no railways for a man and his dog to return home by after having come up a hundred miles with a drove of sheep and some beasts.

Miss Fromont, who kept the 'King's Head Inn,' also at Thatcham, where the New Company's coaches dined and supped, was one of the principal proprietors of these coaches. From the circumstance of these coaches being much slower than any of the others on the road, and the only six insiders, they allowed the others, as a matter of course, to pass them; it sometimes, however, happened that loads might be light, roads good, or the coachman inclined to have a bit of a lark, when it was generally found that for a gallop the New Company horses could hold their own. I believe Miss Fromont managed her coaching business with considerable ability, and from the slow rate at which they travelled, her horses lasted much longer, and the wear and tear was very much diminished as compared with the stock of her opponents; indeed, it was considered that the New Company paid as well as any on the road. She died about four years since, at a good old age, much respected in the neighbourhood where she had been known for so many years.

As showing the strain to which coach horses were often put, I casually heard this one day: I was waiting for a train at the Willesden Junction,



when a grey-headed old gentleman came in, and in the course of conversation with another, he said he remembered the days when he used to travel from London to Birmingham by the coaches before there were any railways, how the horses were worked, especially at night, and that in one day in a very hot summer—I forget the year he mentioned—eighteen horses dropped down dead in the coaches, somewhere about Grantham and York. This was rather the reverse of what Mathews used to say at the Adelphi Theatre, describing four-in-hand driving: ‘Here you are, your four-in-hand swells, with four horses; three on ’em stands still, while he whips the fourth.’ My train leaving, I was reluctantly obliged to quit the company of the old gentleman at Willesden Junction, who I believe was a commercial traveller bound for Birmingham. Had time permitted, I have no doubt I should have heard from him some interesting accounts of his reminiscences of the old coaching days.

Coach proprietors, like other persons in business, were not exempt from losses in various ways, such as influenza or other serious complaints getting into their stables, and causing them considerable inconvenience and anxiety in order to supply immediately the places of horses incapacitated from sickness, as the mails especially they were bound to keep going and send forward punctually, unless

prevented by uncontrollable circumstances, such as snow-storms and floods. With the coaches, however, they had more latitude, and were not under the heavy penalties contained in their contracts with the Postmaster-General in the event of their failing to keep the mails going to their proper time, which would occasionally cause the loss of a horse from overwork, as happened in one instance on the Bristol and Liverpool mail, which used to travel at a terrific pace, the greater part of the journey being performed in the night. An old steeplechase horse, running leader in it, suddenly dropped in the middle of a stage, and died on the spot. He was dragged to the side of the road by the guard and coachman, who said, 'Get his clothes off' (meaning his harness), which was done directly, and the mail went on with three horses only.

This was a loss merely of one horse, but perhaps the heaviest that ever fell on any coach proprietor at one time occurred to Mr. Robert Lovegrove, who kept the 'Bear,' at Maidenhead, and horsed the Bath and Bristol mails, as well as several coaches from Maidenhead to Reading. He was a man who was always very attentive to the coachmen and guards, and every night when the mails came down to his house, between ten and eleven o'clock, there was some cold meat ready for them just to get a snack while the horses were changed.

No charge was made for this. A fire occurred at his stables at Reading, in the month of February, 1835, destroying thirty-five mail and coach horses, together with their harness, hay, corn, &c. The circumstance created a great sensation at the time, and of course caused no small difficulty in providing horses to supply the places of those destroyed. Posters and all other horses that could be procured were pressed into the service, and some of the neighbouring gentlemen lent their own to assist Mr. Lovegrove in his emergency.

A very accurate account of the destructive fire appeared in a local paper in February, 1835, and which was as follows :—

‘ Dreadful Fire.—Between three and four o’clock on Thursday morning last the stables of Mr. Lovegrove, situated at the corner of Red Lane, close to the high London Road, were discovered to be enveloped in flames by the residents of a house opposite. An alarm was instantly given, and assistance procured, but all in vain, as the thatched roofs of the building almost immediately fell, burning beneath them no less than *thirty-five* horses employed in the mail and other stage coaches.<sup>1</sup> The stables consisted of two buildings, divided by a

<sup>1</sup> One horse was rescued out of the stables, and from that circumstance was called ‘Miraculous,’ and he worked for some time in the Bristol mail from Reading upwards.

wall, but the roofs communicated, therefore the fire extended from one to the other by the roof. When the ruins were cleared a most horrible spectacle was presented in the mutilated remains of these unfortunate and suffering victims of abominable and culpable carelessness. The greater number, we trust, of the poor animals were suffocated by the smoke and heated air as they lay in the rows they had formed when standing, but in one building the varied positions and writhing forms darkened to cinders, showed too clearly the dreadful torture undergone by these useful and unoffending servants of man. The fury of the flames was such that the limbs of nearly all the horses were entirely destroyed, the blackened carcase in many instances alone remaining of the powerful frame which just previously was full of life and vigour. From inquiries instituted it appears that the "Age," Bristol coach, had just left for London, and this being the last, the two men in attendance locked the stables, after, as they state, having carefully extinguished the light, but a spark from the lantern no doubt was the origin of the catastrophe. The duration of the fire did not exceed forty minutes. It is too generally the custom of the stable-keepers to remove the candle from the lantern, which all proprietors ought strictly to forbid. In addition to this calamity we find that the owner is but

partially insured, and that his loss, including hay, sets of harness, &c., will not be far short of 700*l*. One circumstance of a gratifying nature in this melancholy recital is that there is not the least ground to suppose it the act of an incendiary, the general respect felt for the owner would alone destroy all supposition of it, were it possible to believe any human being in existence could for a moment contemplate an act so much more dreadful than language can describe. Had the fire commenced one hour earlier twelve of the poor animals would have been saved, as that number had not then arrived.'

I regret to add that the opinion above expressed as to the fire being accidental, from subsequent inquiries turned out to be incorrect, for in the next week's paper these further particulars appeared :

'In our last paper we had to record the destruction by fire of thirty-five valuable horses in Redlands stables. We have now the unpleasant task to add that from the strictest investigation which has now been made, there is not the slightest doubt that it was the atrocious and inhuman act of some monster instigated by revenge against the supposed proprietor. No charge of negligence exists against the horsekeepers, who have for many years conducted themselves with the greatest steadiness.

Acts of extraordinary wickedness stimulated by dreadful passions always fail in their object. In the present case the chief sufferer was not the owner of the building, and, we regret to say, another, equally undeserving and ill able to sustain the loss, is a partner in the misfortune. The fire extended to a barn, two lofts, and piggeries, adjoining the property of Mr. Wells, of the "Row Barge," which, with their contents, consisting of twelve sacks of potatoes, fourteen bushels of onions, a quantity of seeds, &c., to the value of fifty pounds, were totally consumed. A subscription is set on foot to remunerate this sufferer from the atrocity of the incendiary, and we doubt not our readers will contribute their assistance. Mr. Wells was one of the first on the spot, and had human means been possible, could have extricated the unfortunate animals, but the building was so completely fired it was a fruitless attempt.'

Nothing was subsequently discovered to show how the fire had originated.



## CHAPTER X.

### TIME-KEEPING ON THE OLD COACHES





## CHAPTER X.

I HAVE mentioned Miss Fromont as an instance of a female coach proprietor of some notoriety on the western road. A still more notable one, whose line of business, however, was principally, although not entirely, on the roads into the eastern counties, was Mrs. Ann Nelson, of the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate; and by-the-bye, there was Sarah Ann Mountain, of the 'Saracen's Head,' Snow Hill, one of the proprietors of the noted 'Tally Ho,' to Birmingham.

Mrs. Nelson's coaches on the eastern roads were, *par excellence*, the coaches. Her Norwich 'Phenomenon,' a day-coach; the Ipswich 'Shannon;' and specially, while on the western road, she had the Exeter 'Telegraph' (day) and 'Defiance' (night) coaches. Her son, John Nelson, assisted her in the business, Robert Nelson having the 'Belle Sauvage,' on Ludgate Hill, entirely to himself. After coaching business came to an end he kept the Portland Hotel, in Great Portland Street, to the time of his death, now some years since.

For some time before the 'Telegraph' day-coach to Exeter was taken off the road, Mrs. Nelson was joined in it by Mr. Sherman, who kept the 'Bull and Mouth,' now known as the 'Queen's Hotel,' opposite the entrance to the General Post Office yard, in St. Martin's-le-Grand. The gateway, however, under which all the mails and coaches used to pass to and from the yard is thrown into the hotel, of which it forms the entrance, and the best man that ever tooled four horses could no longer drive out of the 'Bull and Mouth' yard into St. Martin's-le-Grand.

The time of the 'Telegraph' when it was jointly horsed by Mrs. Nelson and Mr. Sherman, was—to leave the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, at half-past four, or, according to the present mode of quoting time per 'Bradshaw,' 4.30; Piccadilly at 5.30. Seventeen hours were allowed for performing the journey to Exeter; out of this twenty minutes were allowed for breakfast at Bagshot, and thirty minutes for dinner at Deptford. The time between London and Exeter is very nearly the same as that of the Devonport or 'Quicksilver' Mail, which, however, was only allowed twenty-five minutes for breakfast at Ilminster, where it arrived twenty-five minutes past eight in the morning, being exactly twelve hours after leaving Piccadilly. The day-coach consequently had the longer time allowed for stop-

pages than the mail, but when it is considered that the former had the additional help at the changes which was always at hand in the day-time, while at night there was only the solitary horsekeeper, with the coachman and the guard, if not occupied with the mailbags, and that the coach performed its journey by daylight and the mail was nearly all in the dark, the keeping the same time with the latter was the more difficult task of the two. Both required good coachmen to get through the country at anything like the requisite speed.

By way of giving a reminder to the coachmen on the mails, and also to the guards, as to keeping up to time, the following significant note was at the bottom of the time-bills of the Postmaster-General : ' The time of working each stage is to be reckoned from the coach's arrival, and as any time is to be recovered in the course of the stage, it is the coachman's duty to be as expeditious as possible, and to report the horsekeepers if they are not always ready when the coach arrives, and active in getting it off. The guard is to give his best assistance in changing whenever his official duties do not prevent it.' With this kind little hint of course each proprietor was pretty sharp in seeing that time lost over another man's ground was not made up over his own.

As showing that the proprietors of the day-

coaches were not to be surpassed by the Postmaster-General in their endeavours to preserve punctuality and ensure the speed of their coaches, their guards carried timepieces exactly like those of the mail guards, and also time-bills; and at the foot of the Exeter 'Telegraph' time-bill this note was appended: 'The guard to fill up this bill precisely as the coach is worked over each stage, and hand it into the office, with the way-bill, to the book-keeper at each end of his journey, with all delays accounted for, and his name signed to the same.' While at the foot of the Manchester 'Telegraph' day-coach time-bills these still more stringent memoranda were added:—

'Observe—That a fine of one shilling per minute will be incurred by each proprietor for every minute of time lost over his stage or stages, to one-half of which the coachman and guard will be held liable equally between them, should their employers see sufficient cause for enforcing the same.

'Misdating the time-bill, or neglecting to date at all (either with pen and ink or pencil), at any of the above places, the moment he arrives, will subject the guard to a fine of five shillings for each default. The guard is also to leave his time-bill in the office on his arrival at the 'Bull and Mouth,' or forfeit five shillings for each omission.'

To such a nicety was this coach timed, that Mr. Sherman, who horsed it out of London to St. Albans, agreed to give the next person who horsed on from that place ‘two minutes coming up for two minutes going down,’ the reason being, I take it, that going from London to St. Albans was much more against the collar than on the return journey up.

The time allowed *from* London *to* Edinburgh for the mail was forty-two hours twenty-three minutes; the time *from* Edinburgh to London was forty-five hours thirty-nine minutes. Why the difference in time was made between the down and up journeys I am unable to explain, as I should have thought the extra allowance would have been made in the down journey.

While on the subject of time I may mention the ‘Quicksilver,’ a Brighton coach which used to perform the journey in four hours and a half. This coach, with several others, was horsed by a man named Israel Alexander, and started from the ‘Three Nuns’ in Aldgate, within a few doors of Mrs. Ann Nelson’s. This coach was sent down by him with a copy of the King’s Speech the day Parliament opened, in three hours and forty minutes. Everything, of course, was ready down the road for expediting the journey in every possible way; but whether any passengers were con-

veyed by it on that particular journey I don't know. It was done as a feat to show, I suppose, in how short a time the Speech could be published in Brighton.

I have not much information about the Edinburgh and Aberdeen 'Defiance.' It was, however, a business undertaking, carried on for some years by two gentlemen, Captain Barclay being the principal proprietor. They had, I believe, no previous experience in actual coaching business, but they worked this one in first-rate style, considering the coach was licensed to carry eleven out, besides coachman and guard, and four inside, with luggage. In punctuality and freedom from accidents it was said not to be surpassed by the mails or any other coaches.

To be quite exact, the distance was 129 miles and a quarter, and the time twelve hours and ten minutes. From this had to be deducted thirty minutes for crossing a ferry, unloading and loading the coach, and getting over only two miles ; while twenty minutes was allowed for breakfast, and ten for luncheon. A calculation will show this was by no means bad travelling, especially when it is remembered that all the arrangements were conducted by amateurs, and not professional coach proprietors. The time-bills announced that the coach left the 'Waterloo' Hotel 'every lawful

morning,' which, I take it, meant every day except Sunday.

Without presuming to have a very accurate judgment of horses, yet, when looking at the various teams in the coaches of the day as they have arrived at Hatchett's, 'White Horse,' Piccadilly, it often struck me that they were a trifle too light and slight for the coaches in the days of road-travelling. Admirably selected and fully adequate to the work they had to perform the teams were, no doubt; but those which had to work in what may be called business coaches, which were worked wholly and solely for the profits to be derived from them, were totally different. It used to be considered that a horse commencing his coaching career in a fast day-coach lasted three years; after this, of course, there was a good deal of work left in him, and he had to go through the various gradations of a coach horse's life till he was used up in the manner I have described in a previous chapter. I question much if many of the light little horses in the present day-coaches could have stood the work and done their share winter and summer consecutively for three years. I think the heavily-loaded coaches in winter would have beaten them.

There were many places on the principal roads out of London where the coaches both day and night, in order to enable them to keep time, were



obliged to have six horses if the road was bad, load heavy, country hilly, or stock a little out of order. On such occasions a stable-boy or helper would ride with a pair of old screws hitched on to the leaders' traces, the same as leaders in posting with two postboys. As these extra horses were only wanted perhaps for two or three miles, or up a long hill, I need scarcely say they were anything but a first-rate pair, probably two worn-out old horses who had finished their coaching days, and were kept for odd jobs about the inn-yard or light cart-work on the farm. They were generally game-looking old cripples that had seen better days, and the riding-boy with his postboy's whip and one spur worked hard to keep their traces tight while he was in front of the coach. He occasionally got strong admonitory cautions from the coachman if he did not keep well up to his work, but, fortunately for him, he was beyond the reach of his whip, and I have seen him, when his horses were taken off at the top of a hill, keep a sharp eye up towards the box, and keep far beyond the reach of the thong, double or single.

It might be a matter of some interest and benefit to compare the expenses of working mails and stage coaches in the olden times with the present, and possibly it might lead to some results being arrived at which would show that coaches may be

worked on roads which have as yet been uncovered. The opposition of railways, especially immediately round London, the very territory of modern coaching, is a vast source of competition, but against this (perhaps the only set-off) is the abolition of pikes in and around London. The large sums paid for them by coaches amounted pretty nearly to the question whether a coach paid or not. The mails ran toll free, and in most instances the contractors received a small mileage from the Government for conveying the bags, varying from a penny to fivepence the double mile.

As showing the heavy disbursements for pikes paid by some coaches running out of London, I subjoin this table :—

		£	s.	d.
London and Brighton,	per day . . . .	1	4	6
„	Manchester „ . . . .	5	13	5
„	Birmingham „ . . . .	3	11	9
„	Liverpool „ . . . .	5	4	7
„	Cambridge „ . . . .	0	17	6
„	Portsmouth „ . . . .	0	12	0

A coachmaster's month was twenty-eight days, all their accounts being made up and profits shared amongst them according to the number of miles each horsed the coach for those days. A London proprietor reckoned the tolls averaged 11*s.* 5*d.* per mile for twenty-eight days.

About the last crack coach that ran out of London was the Bedford 'Times,' which continued

on the road until the opening of the Great Northern Railway about 1848. It was originally started by Mr. Whitbread, and was built after the style of the private drag, or, as they were called, coaches, at that day—the word drag, as applied to a four-horse coach, was not, I think, introduced until after coaches had gone off the road.

The Bedford 'Times' was tooled by some good men as coachmen at different times—George Crow, who used to drive it every day from Bedford to the 'Peacock' at Islington, where he stopped and got his dinner, while another man took the coach to the 'George and Blue Boar' in Holborn (now converted into the 'Inns of Court' Hotel), and brought the fresh coach back to the 'Peacock,' when Crow drove it back to Bedford. After his death his brother, one of the old Weller build, took his place. He was a very fat man, and like one of the members of the select committee of coachmen whom Dickens describes so admirably as accompanying Mr. Weller to the Bank when he went to sell out the 'Reduced Counsels,' the buttons on the backs of their coats being so far apart that no man had ever seen both of them at the same time.

At the time the Bedford 'Times' was running, a man named Burke, of trotting celebrity in those days, laid a wager that he would trot his pony





against the Bedford 'Times' from Bedford to London and back, an attempted act of cruelty for which he was afterwards prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. To understand the nature of the undertaking, it is necessary I should mention the times of the coach, distance, &c.

Bedford is about fifty-two miles from London, measured on the north road, where the miles were calculated from the 'spot where Hicks's Hall formerly stood,' being about Clerkenwell Green. The coach was a fast one, being timed, as Mr. Horne, who horsed it out of London, said, at ten miles and a half, including stoppages. The time when the up-coach arrived at the 'George and Blue Boar' was about half-past one, and the fresh coach was in the yard and loaded, ready for the coachman to take it out at two o'clock to the 'Peacock,' when it was driven away down to Bedford. This shows at once that if the pony kept time and beat the coach up to the 'George and Blue Boar,' it could not have much more than half-an-hour's rest before it turned out to go back to Bedford against the coach.

The pony was driven in a tandem match-cart by Burke, and actually got back as far as Shefford, having been dragged a considerable distance by the leader. Shefford is about nine miles from Bedford.

Whether the poor brute died after it was got into the stable I am not sure. I believe it did.

The circumstances are no doubt within the memory of many of my readers. 'Tom Spring' was in some way connected with the transaction, but in what capacity I do not recollect—whether timekeeper, backer, or what not. At that time he kept a fighting-house known as the 'Castle,' in Holborn.

In March, 1837, Burke undertook with two ponies to go from the 'Bolt in Tun,' Fleet Street, to Boswell the coach proprietor's house at Hereford, against the 'Mazeppa' coach, 137 miles. He reached the house 12 minutes before the coach, completing his journey in 14 hours 11 minutes.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MAIL AND COACH TIMES AND TIME-BILLS





## CHAPTER XI.

It is difficult to decide which was the best or fastest coach or mail out of London, but probably among the coaches those that performed the long journeys in one day, and were not started until coaching had arrived at its zenith, such as the Exeter 'Telegraph,' Shrewsbury 'Wonder,' its opponent, the 'Nimrod,' and the Manchester 'Telegraph' would bear the palm.<sup>1</sup> On a close comparison, however, it will be seen that some of the mails—that is, a few of the fastest—especially if punctuality is to be taken into account, headed the coaches in pace. One of the large London coach proprietors said, 'If you take a mail and another coach for two years, the mail will be found to be the speediest,' and this is corroborated by one of the Post Office officials, who said he did 'not know any coach that travelled as fast as the

<sup>1</sup> The 'Wonder' was started in 1825 by Sherman of the 'Bull and Mouth,' the Exeter 'Telegraph' by Mrs. Nelson soon afterwards, and the Manchester 'Telegraph' by Sherman in 1833.

mail for a distance of 150 miles,' and that 'no coach travelled so fast as the mail upon the Holyhead road, not even the "Wonder."' Down to Birmingham, according to their respective time-bills, this was undoubtedly not the case, as the 'Wonder' was allowed eleven hours and four minutes, out of which it stopped twenty minutes for breakfast on the down journey at Redbourn, and five minutes for business at Coventry, while the mail was timed at eleven hours and eight minutes down, without any other stoppage than for changing horses and taking up and putting down letter bags. In nearly every instance of comparison between the rate of travelling of a mail and coach, considerable allowance should be made, especially if it is a mail leaving London at eight o'clock at night, for the additional time required at each change. There were plenty of hands ready to change at each stage when the day-coaches arrived, but in the dead of the night it devolved solely on the horsekeeper and coachman, with the assistance of the guard, if not otherwise engaged with the letter-bags, which seldom happened unless the change was in some very little village, and at an out-of-the-way little public.

I daresay it may rather surprise my readers to learn that neither the Holyhead nor 'Quicksilver' mails, nor indeed any mail out of London, was the fastest mail running—

	Miles	Furlongs.
The 'Quicksilver,' being timed exclusive of stoppages, at per hour . . . . .	9	4
The Holyhead ditto . . . . .	10	1

This was the fastest out of London except the Bristol, but *the* fastest of any in the kingdom was the Liverpool and Preston, timed at ten miles five furlongs an hour, but this was only about thirty miles.

The average speed of mails, taking both four-horse and pair-horse, was eight miles seven furlongs an hour; and in the year 1836 there were only six mails which travelled at a rate of ten miles and upwards, viz. :—

	Miles	Furlongs
Birmingham and Sheffield . . . . .	10	0
Pontefract and Leeds . . . . .	10	0
London and Holyhead . . . . .	10	1
Gloucester and Carmarthen . . . . .	10	2
Carlisle and Glasgow . . . . .	10	4
Liverpool and Preston . . . . .	10	5

All the above times are exclusive of stoppages for meals and office duty; the former were few and far between, and not very long when made. Twenty or five-and-twenty minutes is not very long to warm your fingers, so as to be able to handle a knife and fork efficiently, and to consume what you might get on your plate at either dinner or supper. *Apropos* of the short time allowed for meals to coach travellers, there used to be a tale told of a dodge resorted to by a passenger in order to get additional time to finish his supper one night.

For the correctness of the tale, or its being anything more than a tale, I do not vouch, but here it is:— All the passengers had left the supper-room except (I will call him) Brown, and were getting up on the coach, which was on the point of starting, when Brown rang the bell, and in came the waiter. He was asked for either a spoon or a fork, when, to his astonishment, he saw scarcely one on the table, although there had been plenty there a short time previously. On seeing his astonishment, Brown suggested delicately that some passenger might have taken them. This, of course, caused considerable commotion, the coach being detained while some inquiries were made. Meanwhile Brown finished his supper, and went out to the coach, when he informed the waiter that, on looking under the hearthrug, he would find the missing spoons and forks. Brown mounted the coach, highly gratified with the success of his stratagem.

A similar plan could not be adopted to procure an addition to the ten minutes of the railway refreshment allowance, which is little enough certainly if you really want anything beyond a ‘bit and a sup.’

For those who are fond of figures, or like to amuse themselves in working out the rate of speed of the coaches in olden times, I have set out at the end of this chapter copies of the time-bills of some of the fastest coaches out of London, also a list of

the principal mails out of London, with the distances they travelled and the time allowed for the journeys. There seem to besome slight discrepancies in distances, as appearing on the mail and coach bills, which I am unable to account for, but I should presume that the Post Office authorities were accurate in theirs, and most likely derived from actual measurements from the General Post Office, as they had to pay for horsing the mails by mileage, and any slight inaccuracies on so large a scale would amount in the course of the year to a considerable sum, the amount paid for the supply of mail coaches in one year being over 21,000*l.*, while it had at an earlier period averaged nearly 33,000*l.*, the number of double miles of all the mails travelling being 6,619 for each journey; or perhaps, to put it a little more clearly, the mail going from London to Gloucester would travel 111 miles, and the up mail the same distance every night, so with all the others.

Taking a horse a mile, there must have been a good many employed in mail work alone; and, moreover, a good deal of money to be earned before there was anything to be shared at the end of the month among the proprietors. In the mail business, however, parcels brought in no inconsiderable amount, and contributed largely towards the receipts.

*Time-Bill of the 'Telegraph' Coach from London to  
Manchester.*

Down

Guard.

Leave the 'Bull and Mouth' at 5 A.M.

Left the 'Peacock' at 5.15

Proprietors	Places	Miles	Time Allowed	Should Arrive	Did Arrive	
			H. M.	H. M.		
Sherman .	St. Albans .	19½	1 54	7 9		
Liley .	Redbourn .	4½	0 22	7 31		
Fossey .	Hockliffe .	12½	1 10	8 41		
	Northampton— Breakfast .	—	0 20	—		
Shaw .	Harboro' .	47½	4 30	1 31		
	Leicester— Business .	—	0 5	—		
Pettifer .	Loughboro' .	26	2 27	4 3		
	Derby—Dinner	—	0 20	—		
Mason .	Ashbourne .	30	2 48	7 11		
Wood .	Waterhouses .	7½	0 43	7 54		
Linley .	Bullock Smithy	29½	2 46	10 40		
Wetherall & Co. .	Manchester .	9	0 50	11 30		
		186	18 15			

Guard (sign your name)

Timepiece No. .

*Time-Bill of the 'Wonder' Coach from London to Shrewsbury.*

Despatched from the 'Bull and Mouth' at 6.30 morning.

Left the 'Peacock' at Islington at 6.45 o'clock.

Down

Guard.

Proprietors	Places	Miles	Time Allowed	Should Arrive	Did Arrive	Time Lost
			H. M.	H. M.		
Sherman .	St. Albans .	22½	2 3	8 48		
J. Liley .	Redbourn .	4½	0 25	9 13		
	Breakfast .	—	0 20	—		
Goodyear .	Dunstable .	8½	0 48	10 21		
Sheppard .	Daventry .	29¾	2 54	2 15		
Collier .	Coventry .	19	1 47	4 2		
	Business .	—	0 5	—		
Vyse .	Birmingham .	19	1 39	5 46		
	Dinner .	—	0 35	—		
Evans .	Wolverhampton .	14	1 15	7 36		
	Business .	—	0 5	—		
	Summer House	6½	0 35	8 16		
J. Taylor .	Shiffnall .	6½	0 35	8 51		
H. J. Taylor	Haygate .	8	0 43	9 34		
J. Taylor .	Shrewsbury .	10	0 56	10 30		
		158	15 45			

Guard (sign your name)

Timepiece No. .



*'Telegraph' Coach from London to Exeter.*

To leave the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, at half-past four o'clock, and  
Piccadilly at half-past five A.M.

Left the 'Bull and Mouth' at o'clock.

Guard.

Coachman.

Proprietors	Places	Miles	Time Allowed	Should Arrive	Did Arrive	Extra Stoppages
			H. M.	H. M.		
Sherman .	Staines . .	17	1 35	7 5		
Scarborough	Bagshot . .	10	0 55	8 0		
	Breakfast . .	—	0 20	8 20		
Curtis . .	Overton . .	27	2 36	10 56		
Woodward .	Andover . .	10½	1 4	12 0		
Matcham .	Amesbury . .	14	1 18	1 18		
Davis . .	Deptford Inn .	9½	0 55	2 13		
	Dinner . .	—	0 30	2 43		
Southcott .	Wincanton . .	21	2 2	4 45		
Soaring . .	Ilminster . .	25	2 20	7 5		
Blake . .	Honiton . .	15	1 48	8 53		
Stephens .	Exeter . .	16	1 37	10 30		
		165	17 0			

*'Defiance' Coach from London to Exeter.*

To leave the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, at quarter-past three o'clock, and  
Piccadilly at half-past four o'clock, afternoon 1837.

Guard down.

Coachman.

Passengers		Proprietors	Places	Miles	Time Allowed	Should Arrive	Did Arrive	Extra Stoppages
In	Out				H. M.	H. M.	H. M.	
		Nelson .	Staines .	17	1 50	6 20		
		Scarboro .	Bagshot .	10	1 5	7 25		
		Ward .	Basing- stoke .	19	2 5	9 30		
			Tea .	—	0 20	—		
		Curtis .	Overton .	8	0 52	10 42		
		Broad .	Amesbury	24½	2 40	1 22		
		Davies .	Deptford Inn .	9½	1 5	2 27		
		Stephens.	Mere .	15	1 37	4 4		
			Breakfast at Il- minster	—	0 20	—		
		Soaring .	Yarcombe	40¼	4 24	8 48		
		Blake .	Country Inn .	17	1 50	10 38		
		Stephens.	Exeter .	8	0 52	11 30		
				168½	19 0			

Guard.

The guard is required to fill up this bill precisely as the coach is worked over each stage, and hand it into the office with his way-bill to the book-keeper at each end of his journey, with all delays accounted for and his name signed to the same.

To leave Exeter, up, at 5 P.M.

Tea at Ilminster 20 min.

Breakfast at Bagshot 20 min.

London . . . 12

The following table will show the distance travelled by each of the principal mails out of London, the time in which the journeys were performed, the rate of travelling, including all stoppages, and the amount per double mile paid to the contractors horsing the mails :—

Name of Mail	Distance	Time including all Stoppages	Rate of Travelling, including all Stoppages	Amount per double mile paid for Horsing
		M. F. H. M.	M. F.	d.
Bath . . . . .	110 4	11 0	10 0	2
Birmingham, <i>via</i> Banbury .	119 2	11 56	9 7	2
Bristol . . . . .	121 0	11 45	10 2	1
Wetherby . . . . .	195 0	20 36	9 3 <sup>1</sup>	2
Woodside . . . . .	205 0	22 17	9 1	3
Devonport . . . . .	217 5	23 44	9 0	2
York . . . . .	197 0	20 54	9 3 <sup>2</sup>	1
Exeter . . . . .	176 2	18 59	9 2	2
Gloucester . . . . .	111 3	11 55	9 2	2
Halifax . . . . .	195 5	20 5	9 5	Nil <sup>3</sup>
Holyhead . . . . .	259 2	26 55	9 5	1
Hull . . . . .	172 5	18 12	9 3	2
Leeds . . . . .	196 7	21 2	9 2	2
Liverpool . . . . .	201 3	20 50	9 3	1
Louth . . . . .	148 0	15 56	9 2	2
Lynn . . . . .	99 0	10 33	9 3	2
Manchester . . . . .	185 2	19 0	9 6	1
Norwich (Ipswich) . . . .	113 5	11 38	9 6	4
Norwich (Newmarket) . .	117 3	13 1	9 0	5
Stroud . . . . .	104 7	12 9	8 7	3
Worcester . . . . .	114 2	12 20	9 1	3

<sup>1</sup> This continued on to Glasgow, through Carlisle.

<sup>2</sup> This was the Edinburgh mail.

<sup>3</sup> This appears to be the only London mail for the horsing of

While examining the above table, it must be borne in mind that such of the coaches as only travelled about 120 miles stopped only for changing horses, while those going longer distances stopped for meals also, viz., breakfast or breakfast and dinner. I believe the Bath and Bristol are the only two in the above list that had no stoppage for meals.

*London, Exeter, and Devonport Time-Bill.*

Contractors' Names	Number of Passengers		Time Allowed		Despatched from the General Post Office, the of , 183 , at 8 P.M. Coach No. sent out { With time-piece safe, No. to Arrived at the Gloucester Coffee House at Hounslow Staines Arrived at Bagshot at 10.47 Hartford Bridge Basingstoke Overton Arrived at Whitchurch at 1.41 A.M. Arrived at Andover at 2.20 Arrived at Amesbury at 3.39
	In	Out	M. F.	H. M.	
Chaplin .	—	—	{ 12 2 7 1 9 7 }	{ 2 47	
Company	—	—	{ 9 1 10 1 8 0 3 5 }	{ 2 54	
Broad .	—	—	{ 6 7 13 7 }	{ 0 39 1 19	

which the Post Office did not pay anything, but why I am unable to state.

Contractors' Names	Number of Passengers		M. F.	Time Allowed		
	In	Out		H.	M.	
Ward .	—	—	9 5	0	55	Arrived at Deptford Inn at 4.34
Davis .	—	—	{ 0 5 6 5 }	0	41	Wiley Arrived at Cricklade at 5.15
						One mile from, and where bags are dropped for, Hindon
Whitmash	—	—	{ 6 6 7 0 13 4 4 1 }	2	59	Mere Wincanton Ilchester Arrived at Cart Gate at 8.14
Jeffery .	—	—	{ 2 6 5 1 }			Water Gore, six furlongs from, and where bags are dropped for, South Petherton Arrived at Ilminster at 8.58
				0	25	Twenty-five minutes allowed. Off at 9.23
Soaring .	—	—	8 1	0	46	Arrived at Heathfield Arms, Yarcombe, at 10.9
Wheaton	—	—	8 7	0	51	Arrived at Honiton at 11
			16 4	1	34	Arrived at Exeter at 12.34
Cockram	—	—	{ 10 3 9 3 }	0	10	Ten minutes allowed Chudleigh
			{ 13 2 6 6 }	1	57	Arrived at Ashburton at 2.41
Elliott .	—	—	{ 4 0 1 7 }			Ivy Bridge Ridgway, three furlongs from, and where bags are dropped for, Plympton Plymouth

# MAIL AND COACH TIMES AND TIME-BILLS. 159

Contractors' Names	Number of Passengers		M. F.	Time Allowed	
	In	Out		H.	M.
					Arrived at the Post Office, Devonport, the of 183, at 5.14 P.M. by time-piece, at by clock
					Coach No. { Delivered the time-piece safe, No. to
			216 1	21	14

The time of working each stage is to be reckoned from the coach's arrival; and, as any time lost is to be recovered in the course of the stage, it is the coachman's duty to be as expeditious as possible, and to report the horsekeepers if they are not always ready when the coach arrives, and active in getting it off. The guard is to give his best assistance in changing whenever his official duties do not prevent it.

By Command of the Postmaster-General,  
 GEORGE LOUIS, Surveyor and Superintendent.



CHAPTER XII.

MAIL COACH CONTRACTS





## CHAPTER XII.

PREVIOUSLY to the year 1836 the contract for furnishing mail coaches was held by Mr. Vidler, of Millbank, Westminster, who received from the coach proprietors who horsed the mails a certain mileage, being a sum of so much a mile for the use of the coaches which the proprietors were obliged under their contract with the Postmaster-General to have from Mr. Vidler.

The contract was looked upon by the coach builders in the general trade as a very good thing, as they furnished the coach proprietors with coaches of a much more expensive and highly-finished class, bore all the expenses of oiling and cleaning the coaches, and making good general casualties, such as broken leader-bars, front boots kicked in, &c., whereas Mr. Vidler, in addition to charging the mileage, received 500*l.* a quarter for oiling and greasing the coaches, and used to send in to the contractors quarterly bills for 'incidentals,' which meant repairs required from break-

ages and accidents. The sum paid to Mr. Vidler for the ten years prior to 1835 amounted to 32,900*l*. The consequence was that the contract was thrown open, and the country divided into districts, one of which was taken by Messrs. Wright and Horne, large coach builders in London, while the western district was taken by Mr. Williams, an extensive coach builder carrying on business at Bristol.

A style of coach totally different from the old mail was selected by the Postmaster-General from a number of designs submitted for his approval, and it was not to be compared with the old vehicle which it superseded. The new pattern continued in use until the mails went off the road. The old mails were built in the plainest possible way, devoid of anything in the way of ornament or style, and little variation was made in the shape and appearance of them, as can be seen from old pictures from the reign of George III., till the contract was taken out of Mr. Vidler's hands.

So far from an additional sum being necessarily paid for supplying the mail coaches, it might evidently have been done at a much lower rate, as all the four-horse mails were of one size and pattern, so that wheels, nuts, screws, axles, and other parts would fit one as well as another ; and when a coach had been so much used as to be unfit for long

journeys and fast work, it might be transferred to a road where the distance was shorter and the wear-and-tear less, in consequence of travelling at a slower rate. The linings inside and everything about the old coaches being of the plainest description, the building them cost considerably less than a stage coach furnished to the coach proprietors, each of whom would have his coaches built according to his own taste and orders; and if the coach did not answer, and was therefore taken off the road, it was thrown on the builder's hands, who could not put it on the road again without being painted and relettered.

A mail coach of the old style cost about 140 guineas, and with repairs would cost nearly as much in seven years. The wear-and-tear of course depended very much on the pace and road travelled; and the contractor generally found it necessary to provide a coach for every hundred miles. Thus between London and Bath there would be one working up and another down, while a spare one would be kept somewhere in the event of accident.

The mode of payment was by the contractor who provided the mail drawing bills at three months on the persons who horsed the mails for the mileage, the oiling and greasing being paid for by the Postmaster-General. In some instances the

Postmaster-General paid the persons who horsed the mails less per mile than they paid Mr. Vidler for the coaches, and the annual saving to the Post Office, when the contract was thrown open to public competition, was more than 17,000*l*.

The two thousand a year which was paid to Mr. Vidler for oiling and greasing the coaches, and taking them backwards and forwards from his factory to the different inns from which they started, was done away with when the new contract was entered into.

Although the coach proprietors paid a higher mileage for the mails than for their other coaches, they considered that the latter cost the builders about forty pounds more, from being more highly finished and fitted up inside.

So far from the conveyance of letters being an expense to the country, it was a profit of more than two thousand a year, for the stamp duty paid by the horse contractors on the number of miles covered by the mails, which in the year 1836 was upwards of thirteen thousand daily, amounted to 53,000*l*. a year, while the amount paid for horsing was 50,000*l*.

The sums paid for mileage to the contractors varied on different roads and at different times; for instance, an increase in the mileage would be required when an increase in speed was made by

the Post Office, or if, from any circumstances, a mail was paying so indifferently that it was not worth working, or there was difficulty experienced in getting it horsed through the country, the Post Office was obliged to increase the allowance.

At one time as much as 6*d.* a mile was paid for horsing the Holyhead mail, but this was eventually reduced to 2*d.*, which may be taken as the general average rate for mails out of London.

The Bristol, Holyhead, Liverpool, Edinburgh, and Manchester, were all at 2*d.*, the Leeds 2½*d.*, while the Portsmouth was 4*d.*, and the Chester, the very highest, at 8*d.*; but the Halifax was not paid anything at all. Carrying the bags, however, exempted them from tolls, no inconsiderable saving on some roads.

Notwithstanding the mileage received from the Post Office by the horse contractors, the large amount they used to earn in parcel-carrying, their exemption from tolls, and the additional fares they charged, some of them paid but badly. The fares were somewhat higher than even the day-coaches, amounting perhaps in a journey of a hundred miles to some 8*s.* for an outside, and 12*s.* for an inside passenger; but their punctuality insured them a class of passengers who did not mind paying an additional fare for travelling by what was, perhaps, considered the more exclusive conveyance.

Although it might not be a very paying concern, coach proprietors liked to have a share in horsing a mail, as it enabled them to put up at their booking offices Royal Mail Coach Office, which conveyed an impression to the general public that the best coaches ran from that office, and custom was thus secured. The drawbacks with which the mails had to contend were their travelling at night, so that for a considerable distance there was nothing got from the passengers at the inns where they changed horses, the higher rate paid to the contractor for the mail, and at one time the lamps and oil were provided by a Post Office official, no doubt at a higher sum than the coach proprietors paid for the same on their ordinary coaches.

The London men did not on an average work more than thirty miles out of London, at least so far as the mails were concerned, as will be seen by the distances mentioned below, and I conclude they worked their coaches to the same points, it being found inconvenient and subjecting them to loss if they had servants and horses further from home:—

## CHAPLIN.

	Miles		Miles
London and Bath . .	28	London and Hull . .	27
„ Bristol . .	28	„ Liverpool . .	24
„ Devonport . .	48	„ Manchester . .	24
„ Holyhead . .	24	„ Norwich . .	24

## SHERMAN.

	Miles		Miles
London and Carlisle	. 25	London and Exeter	. 19
" Edinburgh	. 35	" Worcester	. 31

Sherman and Chaplin worked fifty miles of the London and Halifax mail between them.

## HORNE.

	Miles		Miles
London and Woodside	. 24	London and Gloucester	. 28
" Dover	. 36	" Hastings	. 14

The earnings of some of the mails and coaches amounted to a considerable sum at the several periodical settlements which took place at the end of a lunar month. Some idea may be formed of the expenses of working coaches when I mention that Horne alone (who was not the largest proprietor in London) used to pay annually to Government 25,000*l.*, and 6,000*l.* a year to Wright and Powell for hire of coaches, and this did not include all, as he had some from other builders.

A coach running from a hundred to a hundred and twenty miles might be reckoned to earn from eighteen to twenty pounds a night.

Disbursements for turnpikes, duty, coachmen, and so on, were reckoned at two pounds a mile a month, so that a coach had to earn 7*l.* a mile a month in order to enable the proprietors to divide what they considered a good remunerative rate. Many, however, were worked for much less; for



instance, the Bath and Exeter mail got down so low that it only earned 3*l.* 8*s.* a month when the proprietors began to talk of giving it up. On the other hand, a night-coach from London to Bristol doing an average business earned 414*l.* in fourteen days, and after payment of all expenses the proprietors divided 2*l.* 5*s.* a mile, or at the rate of 4*l.* 10*s.* a mile for the lunar month. I was once told by a guard that a day or two before Christmas his coach from London to Exeter earned 80*l.* in one journey. It was crammed and covered in every possible way with baskets and parcels, turkeys, hares, oyster-barrels, &c.

The crack 'Devonport' or 'Quicksilver' mail, although so admirably conducted, was not at one time a very paying concern, and it was not until it came into Chaplin's hands that it did well, having previously passed successively through those of Fagg, of the 'Bell and Crown,' and Nelson, of the 'Belle Sauvage.' That it was pretty well done by Chaplin may be supposed from the fact that he said that out of about 150 well-bred horses he had standing at Hounslow, three-fourths of them had been through the Devonport mail. About 170 mails and coaches passed through there in the twenty-four hours, and I should suppose that more coach horses stood at Hounslow than in any village in the kingdom, as being just on the London side

of the point where the Exeter road branches off from the Bath, Oxford, and Gloucester, nearly all the western traffic passed through it; some, but only an inconsiderable portion, went by the Uxbridge road.

I have not the means of arriving at the precise number of coaches travelling respectively on the north and western roads; but if any place had more coaches passing through it than Hounslow it would be Barnet, which was the first stage out of London on the north road, it being situated in much the same position as Hounslow, as at the northern end of the town the two roads separate, one going through Hatfield and Hitchin to York, the other to Birmingham and Holyhead through St. Albans.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### HOW THE OLD MAILS WERE WORKED



## CHAPTER XIII.

THE persons who agreed with the Postmaster-General to horse the mails signed and sealed a most lengthy and verbose document, and also the time-bill annexed to it, denoting the number of miles each person was to horse the mail and the time allowed him to do it.

There were three different arrangements between the Postmaster-General and the contractors, one by which the former provided the coaches and paid the contractors a certain sum for horsing them, and another by which the Postmaster-General provided the coaches and the contractors paid the Revenue a certain mileage for the use of them. Both of these were called first-class contracts. By second-class contracts the contractors provided the coaches, subject to the approval of the Postmaster-General.

To set out verbatim a form of one of these contracts as used by the Postmaster-General between himself and the contractors for each of the mails

would only be copying what, I think, no one would care to read through ; but I will endeavour to give an epitome of it which will show how strict the regulations were, and what care was taken by the legal advisers of the Postmaster-General to provide in every way for the due and punctual conveyance of the mails.

The contract was made between his Majesty's Postmaster-General and the several persons whose names were subscribed and seals affixed, and who were resident at the several places set opposite to the signature of each person, and then, omitting some technical legal phraseology, it provides—

That the subscribers shall convey the mails, or bags of letters, from the General Post Office in London to the several post-towns between that place and the town of . . . and back by such coaches as the Postmaster-General shall appoint, to be furnished by the persons with whom the Postmaster-General may contract for such purpose ; to convey free of expense the guard appointed by the Postmaster-General, and all bags of bye or cross road letters or of any other description.

The coaches to leave the Post Office in London and Post Office at . . . every day, Sundays included, and receive and deliver letter-bags at such intermediate places as the Postmaster-General may direct, and to leave London and the town of

. . . at such hours of the day or night as he shall direct, and travel at such rate as is expressed in the time-bill annexed. Subscribers at all times to employ steady, able, sound, and sufficient horses, and also good, sound, and sufficient harness to the satisfaction of the Postmaster-General or the superintendent of mail coaches, and, if required, remove any of the horses or harness, and substitute others to the good liking of the Postmaster-General or superintendent.

At their own costs and charges the subscribers to furnish such number of lamps of such construction and on such principles as approved, and well and sufficiently light them during such hours of the night or day as should be needful, or as the Postmaster-General or superintendent might direct, and when required remove any of the lamps and substitute others to the good liking of the Postmaster-General or superintendent.

In all respects to conform to the regulations mentioned in the time-bill for the departure and arrival and length of stay at the several towns and places mentioned in the time-bill, and for taking meals or sorting letters or otherwise, and in all cases to prevent the stopping of the coaches and coachmen between the places where the horses were to be changed under any pretence whatsoever; to perform the stages agreeably to the directions



marked in the time-bill within the time therein allowed, except in case of accidents, or of the roads being impassable by floods or other events rendering it impossible for carriages of any description to travel. To the utmost of their ability to excite in the coachmen, horsekeepers, and others active and diligent attention in changing the horses and every other part of their duty, and discharge any of them if required by the Postmaster-General.

In case the subscribers refused to remove any horses or harness and substitute others, committed any breach of the contract, or became bankrupt or insolvent, Postmaster-General might remove such person from the contract. On death of one subscriber the others bound to cover the ground. No one voluntarily to resign his engagement without sanction of Postmaster-General, and if he was obliged at any time to forward the mails, the expense to be deducted by him out of any money payable to the subscribers, or be paid by them personally. Not on any pretence to use any other carriage for conveying the bags than those provided as before-mentioned ; want of passengers not to be any excuse for not conveying the bags regularly at all seasons of the year, and under all circumstances. ‘Contractors not to oppose the interest of each other in any other part of the kingdom, but promote the well-doing of each other, so

that by a mutual return of favour a general connection and union of interests might be established by them from one end of the kingdom to the other.' None of the coaches to be used for any other purpose whatever. Dry and fit coach-houses to be furnished where a mail coach was stationed, and in case any coaches were stopped or blocked on the road contractors to send them to their proper stations. Subscribers to pay on demand expenses of repairs to coaches occasioned by negligence, carelessness, intoxication, or default of driver, or from vicious, restive, or faulty horses.

Boxes, trunks, packages and parcels, or luggage of any description, not to be placed on the roof of any of the coaches, or be carried on or about any part of the outside; but be put only in the boot, on the seats, or with the passengers, if they wished it, inside. Superintendents of mail coaches to be carried on office duty free of expense. No coachman to drive a single stage only, but each to drive such space of ground as ordered by the Postmaster-General. No one to run his horses so long a stage as to render it necessary to water them.

Not permit the mail to be detained at any place longer than allowed in the time-bill.

Generally, the subscribers, to the utmost of their power, to promote his Majesty's service and the benefit of the revenue, and obey all orders re-

ceived from the Postmaster-General, and indemnify him against any claims for repairs by the persons furnishing the coaches.

The Postmaster-General, out of the revenue of the Post-Office, to pay quarterly to one of the contractors, for himself and the others, . . . per mile for every entire mile to and from the place from and to which the mails were conveyed ; each journey the entire distance the mails were conveyed to such place and back being considered one journey.

The guards to be furnished, paid, clothed, and armed at the expense of the Post Office.

The Postmaster-General to pay all turnpike and other tolls.

Not lawful on any account whatever to carry more than four inside and more than . . . outside passengers.

Power for either party to determine the contract on three months' written notice, to be given before January 5 or April 5 in any year, and not at any other period.

On breach of any of the agreements, Postmaster-General might without previous notice absolutely determine the contract.

For the performance of the contract each of the subscribers bound himself in the sum of 500*l*.

The above comprises the substance of the con-

tract, divested of legal and technical phraseology, which would increase the length of it above four-fold, and I question very much whether any coach proprietor who horsed a mail ever read it through before signing it.

Although the mails were admirably worked, the contracts certainly were not literally complied with, as the contractors did not 'at all times employ steady, able, and sound horses' or 'good sound harness,' as anyone who has travelled on mails much at night can testify. Neither was the stipulation strictly observed as to not carrying boxes, &c., on the roof, although there used occasionally to be some difficulty and contention with passengers as to their luggage. Luggage was put on the roof, the only other place for it being the front boot, generally full of parcels, which on no account would be refused by the proprietors, as they formed so considerable a part of the earnings of the mail.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### TURNPIKES AND COACHES



## CHAPTER XIV.

IN the days of coaching turnpike bonds used to be considered very safe and good investments, and large sums were realised annually by those who farmed the tolls, which were let annually either by auction or tender. The post-horse duties, being the sums payable to Government upon every letting or job of post-horses, were farmed in the same way, being taken by persons who paid a certain sum, undertaking the trouble and expense of collection, and receiving the difference between sums so paid and the amount actually received in gross as his remuneration or profit. A man who used to do a very large business, indeed the largest by far of any one in farming tolls and post-horse duties, was a Mr. Levy, a great ally of Sherman who kept the 'Bull and Mouth.' He farmed tolls to the amount of 400,000*l.* or 500,000*l.* a year, and post-horse duties to the amount of 300,000*l.* or 400,000*l.* a year. The two businesses worked in well together, as while watching the gates and



checking the money taken by the collector at each, the number of post-chaises or carriages drawn by post-horses, and passing through the gates, could also be checked at the same time, especially as in posting work a ticket had always to be given to the postboy when he started, and by him delivered up at the first turnpike-gate through which he passed. The books containing the forms, with counterfoils, were kept by the postmaster, and were always bound to be produced for the inspection of the Government officer when he visited the inn and required to see them ; the ticket filled up by the postmaster or innkeeper specified the number of horses and the places between which they were to travel. Posting jobs were easily known on the road in those days by the invariable jacket, either blue or yellow, of the 'jolly post-boys,' to say nothing of their always being in the saddle, while in the present day it would be rather difficult to meet with postboys with the regular old costume ; and, in nine cases out of ten, I question if you would find a man with a saddle and the orthodox short whip for riding if you wanted a carriage and pair of horses, or a pair of horses only, to convey you on a journey ; the man would inevitably drive, so that along the road it would not be apparent whether they were post-horses or not. The orthodox get-up of the regular down-the-road

old postboy when on duty consisted, as I have said, of blue or yellow jacket, a very shiny white hat, white cord breeches, top-boots, with a leather shield on the right leg to protect it from the rubbing against the pole, and a short whip fearfully and wonderfully made, and which to be duly appreciated should be seen—at all events it is beyond my descriptive powers. I had almost forgotten one article, which was most conscientiously and invariably adhered to by the postboy; it was the necktie—snowy white, I never remember to have seen a coloured one. It went twice round his neck, was of considerable depth, not unlike the ties the late Lord Brougham used to wear, well-up to the chin, without any collar. It was tied in a mysterious sort of little knot, but where the ends went to there was nothing to indicate; I have an idea they were passed down his back. The choker altogether you might imagine was a jack-towel twisted round the ‘jolly postboy’s’ neck. A yellow waistcoat, with small pearl buttons, completed the fine weather toggery; but in case it should rain on the return journey with the horses the postboy strapped on to the spring of the post-chaise a long drab coat with white bone buttons. Thus equipped, and with a large shawl in the pocket of his coat, he considered himself prepared to meet all weathers—hail, rain, or snow.

The undress or half-dress of the postboy, who was waiting for the 'first turn-out,' when he might be seen at the yard entrance looking out for any posting-job up or down the road, consisted of a long smock-frock of the finest white linen, reaching from his chin nearly down to his heels, or at all events below the top of his boots. The object of this was to keep the white cords and jacket clean; and directly a job appeared in sight the long frock was off, and in an incredibly short time the J. P., or 'jolly postboy,' appeared in the saddle, riding his horse out of the yard, followed by a helper with the other horse to put to.

Of all classes of persons I know of none that more rigidly adhered to their style of dress than the postboy, except the Quakers, irreverently called by Cobbett 'unbaptised buttonless blackguards.' Nobody I suppose ever saw a postboy in the days of real postboys in a coat, a pair of trousers, or a coloured necktie; and nobody I suppose ever knew a postboy who arrived at man's estate, or at least progressed so far as to be called a postman. Why they always remained boys to the end of their lives I never understood, but I have known several of them, certainly over sixty, who were still called postboys. I know but one living at the present day, and he is still called a postboy, but must I am sure be over seventy. Why, on the other hand,

are the letter-carriers always called postmen? Many of them now are in fact so young that they are mere boys, but they are never called so. *Apropos* of postboys, the picture in the Exhibition a few years since was a very accurate representation of the regular postboys, or rather the 'three jolly postboys' in the old song, which will be found in a subsequent chapter.

What the education of the postboy was, or how his earliest boyhood days were spent previously to arriving at the dignity of the blue or yellow jacket, I do not quite know, but I have a strong suspicion that many of them qualified by riding the leaders in the coaches when it became necessary to put on extra pairs either on a hilly road or in consequence of heavy loads, &c. I think all that I have seen officiating in that capacity were actual *bond fide* boys. They never mounted the regular postboy dress, and were probably helpers about the stables and inn-yard, and looked after the poor old cripples who worked as the extra leaders in the coach.

The posting and coaching of course constituted the main revenues of the turnpike receipts, which in 1839 amounted to about a million and a half. There were about eleven hundred different trusts in England and Wales, each employing a staff of officers, such as treasurer, clerk, and surveyor. The number of these officers throughout the king-

dom was considerable, as may be gathered from the fact that in Yorkshire alone there were sixty-eight treasurers, seventy-two clerks, and one hundred surveyors. The number of trusts and officers of course varied according to the size of the counties. Thus in Middlesex there were only six different trusts, in the smallest county, Rutland, only four. How the debts of the different trusts were discharged when the railways opened I am not aware, but I believe the result was in many instances that, from want of income arising from the tolls, the creditors lost both principal and interest. At many gates the receipts went down so low as scarcely to clear the expenses of collection, to say nothing of paying interest to the ratepayers or bondholders and keeping the roads in repair. This, however, is now thrown on the parishes through which the roads pass where the tolls are insufficient for the purpose, or the gates, as in the neighbourhood of London, have been done away with altogether. Almost the last one remaining was, I believe, the Archway gate, on the old north road from London to St. Albans, and there even the humble pedestrian could not pass without payment of a penny, as appeared by a notice formerly painted on the gate-post. There is a way, however, of avoiding this gate, by going up over the hill through Highgate.

On this road, between London and St. Albans, there were no less than five gates at which coaches used to pay toll over a distance of twenty-one miles—viz., they were:—

Islington . . . . .	2
Highgate Archway . . . . .	4
Whetstone . . . . .	3
South Mimms . . . . .	7
St. Albans . . . . .	2
	<hr/> 18

This amount daily would have made a considerable difference in the course of the season to the St. Albans coach, although it went the West End road to the Regent's Park, where one toll only of two shillings would have been payable, as it did not pass over the road where the Islington or Highgate Archway gates stood.

The great diminution in tolls was manifest on one of the main roads, such as the Birmingham or Bath, directly after the railways opened, as at Whetstone gate, which Mr. Levy farmed at one time, and where they kept an account of the tolls paid by the coaches, they went down to 25*l.* a week, about half what they were before the railways opened; while at the St. Albans gate they went down from 74*l.* to 25*l.* a week, and on the Maidenhead road they decreased from 18*l.* to about 4*l.* a week. On the Brighton road, at one gate

where the tolls amounted to 2,400*l.* a year, Mr. Levy reckoned that 1,600*l.* of that sum was derived from stage coaches alone. From his experience and extensive transactions in turnpike matters, he was as good an authority as you could have. The tolls on some of the roads out of London he farmed as far down as sixty or seventy miles.

On the London and Birmingham road I suppose there were more coaches running than on any other road out of London; Sherman alone, the proprietor of the 'Bull and Mouth,' having about nine, while most of the other large London coach proprietors, such as Chaplin, Horne, Nelson, and Mountain, had something on that road; and probably more coaches and mails passed through the Highgate Archway and Whetstone gates than any others in the kingdom, as many of the Manchester, Liverpool, and north-country coaches branched off after they passed Barnet, and went through Hatfield, Hitchin, &c.

A coach from London to Birmingham running every day, including Sundays, paid annually for tolls 1,428*l.*, some of the gates charging double on Sundays. This charge shows that tolls formed a very considerable item in coaching expenses, and as the mails in England—although they did in Scotland—did not pay tolls, on the Holyhead mail this left between London and Birmingham 1,428*l.*

to the good, or, in other words, an advantage *pro tanto* to those horsing the mail over persons working a coach over the same ground. There were, of course, other differences between the two, as the coach could carry eleven outside passengers, while the mail was only allowed to take three or four. Again, the contractors were paid for horsing the mail, while the coach proprietor only received the fares for the passengers and the carriage of parcels.

The decline of coaching was consequent, of course, on the opening of a railway; and as long ago as the year 1839 all the coaches were cleared off the Birmingham road, except, I believe, the 'Greyhound' and 'Albion.' The 'Wonder' went off from London to Shrewsbury in 1838, and all the day-coaches were swept away by about that year. Sherman, who had the largest number of coaches running on the Birmingham road of any of the London proprietors, kept his coaches going as long as he and his partners could manage it, and accordingly lost any share in the railway-carrying business, which was obtained by Chaplin and Horne, who had taken all their coaches off and thrown their interest into the London and Birmingham Railway Company. Taking warning, however, by the lesson he thus learnt by keeping his coaches on the road as long as possible, Sherman joined



the Great Western as soon as it opened, and thus obtained a good deal of their London carrying business and the omnibus traffic from their railway yard at Paddington. Although Sherman's principal business was on the north and north-western roads, he had some good coaches running on the Bristol and Exeter roads. The 'Regulator,' for instance, to Bristol started from there some two or three hours after all the other day-coaches were past, and arrived late in town at night. He also had the 'Subscription' coach to Exeter, and, at one time, horsed one side of the Exeter 'Telegraph' day-coach, with Mrs. Nelson, of the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate; and he started the 'Beaufort,' a fast day-coach, to Bath, through Calne and Chippenham, under the patronage, I believe, of the Duke of Beaufort. On the lower ground it was driven by Ted Parr, who, after coaching came to an end, was trainer to Lord St. Vincent. When the Great Western opened to Maidenhead the coaches were put on trucks, and carried by the railway up and down, and so on, as the line opened further, from time to time, as far as Twyford and Reading, until the rail was opened throughout: and, alas! the glory of the road and coaches departed.

The railways were a mode of conveyance with which the coach proprietors could not, under any circumstances, compete, so that as they opened

from time to time the coaching business was annihilated: but before railways the coaches had another very powerful enemy to contend with on some of the roads which led to places accessible by steam, such as Ramsgate, Dover, Yarmouth, Hull, and others: for while the Government duty on each passenger by a stage coach was one-fourth of a penny a mile, and on posting three-fourths of a penny a mile, on passengers by steamer there was no duty payable, and on railways only the eighth of a penny a mile on every passenger. The railway company, however, only paid duty on the number of passengers actually carried, while the coach proprietor paid duty on the number of passengers he was licensed to carry, so that if he ran an empty coach from London to Birmingham he paid just the same as if it was full. In any case the coach proprietor paid much more than the railway company; for example:—

	£	s.	d.
A coach, licensed to carry fifteen passengers, say, average ten, would pay, from London to Birmingham, at 3d. a mile . . . . .	1	7	0
Ten railway passengers at one-eighth of a penny a mile . . . . .	0	11	3
Difference in favour of the railway company . . . . .	0	15	9

What with the opposition from without in the shape of steam and railways, and, before that period, the opposition from within among the coach proprietors themselves, coaching was a business

that required to be very well managed to pay, especially with the middlemen, who had not the inn, booking-office, portorage, and delivery of parcels, &c., which fell into the hands of their partners at each end, and formed no inconsiderable sum in the course of the year. Coaching, as a business and means of livelihood, was very different from what it is at the present day.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEAVY SNOWSTORM IN 1836



## CHAPTER XV.

It may not be altogether devoid of interest to look back to the days of the old coaches which we were obliged to travel by, and see what we had to go through on our journeys. To give some idea of this, I make an extract from a west-country paper containing an account of the great snow-storm throughout the country at Christmas, 1836. Some of the illustrations in Captain Malet's 'Annals of the Road' depict scenes of occurrences at the time. All lovers of coaching should read this book.

I think, after reading the following account, no one who intends having a ride on the coaches during the summer need refrain because the weather is not fine enough. We used to have day-coaching and night-coaching, winter-coaching and summer-coaching, and, of course, were obliged to accommodate ourselves to the occasion. If you were a delicate individual, with a full pocket, and time no object, you might travel in a swell day-

coach; but if it was, as the phrase goes, *plus aliter*, you had to travel outside at night, and make the best of it; which, after all, if you knew how to manage it, was not so bad as those who have never passed a night on the outside of a mail or coach may suppose. I am amused when I sometimes hear a young man's exclamations and astonishment at the tales of these journeys, or the pictures in the olden days—'How miserable! What wretched work it must have been!'

'The heavy fall of snow experienced in and around the metropolis during Christmas night appears to have extended over every part of the kingdom, and to have commenced in the northern parts of the island earlier than with us. On Sunday morning scarcely any of the mail coaches arrived in London before half-past eight o'clock, owing to the heavy state of the roads; but as on that day they bring no bags, no great exertions were made for keeping time.

'The guard of the Glasgow mail, which arrived on Sunday morning, said that the roads were in the northern parts heavy with snow, and that at one place the mail was two hours getting over four miles of ground. Never before, within recollection, was the London mail stopped for a whole night at a few miles from London; and never before has the intercourse between the southern

shires of England and the metropolis been interrupted for two whole days. None of the regular coaches due on Monday from any part of the country had arrived during the night. The Dover, Hastings, Brighton, Chester, Edinburgh, also the Liverpool and Leeds evening mails, had not reached London at twelve o'clock. The only mails that arrived up to that hour were the Poole, Portsmouth, and Ipswich, the latter of which did not reach the Post Office until forty-five minutes past eleven o'clock.

‘Fourteen mail coaches were abandoned on the various roads.

‘The Brighton mail (from London) reached Crawley, but was compelled to return. The Dover mail also returned, not being able to proceed further than Gravesend. The bags for places beyond Crawley and Gravesend were left at those towns respectively. The Hastings mail was also obliged to return. The Brighton up-mail of Sunday had travelled about eight miles from that town, when it fell into a drift of snow, from which it was impossible to extricate it without further assistance. The guard immediately set off to obtain all necessary aid, but when he returned no trace whatever could be found either of the coach, coachman, or passengers, three in number. After much difficulty the coach was found, but



could not be extricated from the hollow into which it had got. The guard did not reach town until seven o'clock on Tuesday night, having been obliged to travel with the bags on horseback, and in many instances to leave the main road, and proceed across fields in order to avoid the deep drifts of snow. The passengers, coachman, and guard slept at Clayton, seven miles from Brighton. The road below Handcross was quite impassable. The non-arrival of the mail at Crawley induced the post-master there to send a man in a gig to ascertain the cause on Monday afternoon. No tidings being heard of man, gig, or horse for several hours, another man was despatched on horseback, and after a long search he found horse and gig completely built up in the snow. The man was in an exhausted state. After considerable difficulty the horse and gig were extricated, and the party returned to Crawley. The man had learned no tidings of the mail, and refused to go out again on any such exploring mission.

'*Brighton, Monday.*—All this part of the country is at the present moment buried in snow. A stableman was picked up in Black Lion Street last night by the police frozen to death; another, an old man named Freeman, dropped dead in the street from sheer cold. The "Times" coach, which leaves London at four o'clock, and generally

arrives here a little after nine, did not get in till twenty minutes past eleven, being for the last fifteen miles of the journey clogged up by the snow. The Gloucester mail, which ought to have been in by five o'clock yesterday afternoon, was obliged to stop on the road, and the guard and the coachman reached this town only at one o'clock this morning, having brought the bags in a cart along the beach; they were, however, so affected by the cold that the guard now lies, it is feared, in a dying state. The mail started as usual for London last night, but had not got three miles before it was obliged to return. A King's messenger, who had important despatches with him, attempted with the assistance of a guide to travel on horseback, but could not get on. The messenger is about to start again in a post-chaise, and the mailbags will go with him, but no passengers. Not a coach besides has left this town or come into it to-day.

'The Portsmouth "Regulator" on Monday got buried, at Horndean Hill, in a snowdrift, and so continued for three hours and twenty minutes, when, by the assistance of numerous labourers and extra horses, the coach was released.

'From Marlborough Forest to Devizes the roads are dreadful, and the hollows have from twelve to sixteen feet of snow.

‘ His Grace the Duke of Wellington arrived at Marlborough on Monday evening in his travelling carriage and four, with outriders. It was understood his Grace was journeying to the mansion of the Duke of Beaufort, to attend at the marriage ceremony to give away the daughter of the late Duke of Beaufort to Mr. Codrington, son of Sir Bethel. His Grace was anxious to pass onward from Marlborough directly ; but learning the roads were impassable, he stopped for the night at the “ Castle Inn ” (kept by Thomas Cooper, a well-known coach proprietor and post-master on the Bath Road), but now the site of Marlborough College. The next morning his Grace started ; but the carriage got fixed in a wheatfield between Marlborough and Badminton. Fortunately the surveyor of that line of roads, Mr. Merrifield, was not far distant, being instructing a body of labourers ; and one of the outriders coming to him, he readily came to the assistance of the noble Duke, whom he piloted across the country till they came to sound-bottomed road.

‘ The Bath and Bristol mails, due on Tuesday morning, were abandoned eighty miles from London, and the mailbags brought up in a post-chaise and four by the two guards, who reached London at six o’clock on Wednesday morning. For seventeen miles of the distance they had come across fields.

‘The Manchester down mail reached St. Albans, and getting off the road into a hollow, was upset. The guard returned to London in a post-chaise and four horses with the bags and passengers. They reached the “Swan with Two Necks” about noon.

‘About a mile from St. Albans, on the London side, a chariot without horses was seen on Tuesday nearly buried in snow. There were two ladies inside who made an earnest appeal to the mail-guard whose coach had got into a drift nearly at the same spot. The ladies said the postboy had left them to go to St. Albans to get fresh cattle, and had been gone two hours. The guard was unable to assist them, and his mail being extracted, he pursued his journey for London, leaving the chariot and ladies in the situation where they were first seen.

‘The Devonport mail arrived at half-past eleven o’clock: the guard, who had travelled with it from Ilminster, a distance of 140 miles, states that journey to have been a most trying one to both men and cattle. The storm commenced when they reached Wincanton, and never afterwards ceased. The wind blew fresh, and the snow and sleet in crossing Salisbury Plain were driving into their faces so as almost to blind them. Between Andover and Whitchurch, the mail was

stuck fast in a snowdrift, and the horses, in attempting to get out, were nearly buried. The coachman got down, and almost disappeared in the drift upon which he alighted. Fortunately at this juncture a waggon with four horses came up, and by unyoking these from the waggon, and attaching them to the mail, it was got out of the hollow in which it was sunk.

‘The Exeter mail, by Yeovil, due on Monday evening, arrived at one o’clock A.M. on Tuesday, and the mail from the same parts, due on Tuesday evening, came in at ten o’clock A.M. The guard of the Monday’s mail states that they left on Monday night, and were at five different places buried in snow, and had to be dug out.

‘The Louth and Boston mailbags of Monday were brought up by the guard between six and seven o’clock on Monday night. The guard states that the bags came to him at Boston, in a post-chaise, and the report was that the mail coach, seven miles from Louth, had got off the road, and went over into a gravel-pit. A horse was said to be killed by the accident, and the guard severely bruised.

‘Last night the mail which was proceeding to London was regularly blocked up by the snow, and 300 men were immediately sent to make a passage through the snow, principally sappers and





miners, and after some hours they succeeded in reaching the mail, when the letter bags were taken out and forwarded to London by express.

‘Thursday.—The few accounts received from the provinces yesterday were of rather a gloomy description. The atmosphere still appears to be loaded with snow, and a second heavy descent is feared. The Dover mail sent out on Wednesday night only reached Rochester, and then turned back. Beyond, the country is deeply buried in snow, and there has been no communication by horse or foot downward since Sunday. By Chatham lines the snow is from thirty to forty feet deep.

‘Application having, on Tuesday, been made to the commandant of the forces stationed at Chatham, by the surveyor of roads, for assistance, all the military were ordered out, and about 600 men have ever since been employed in clearing the roads.

‘The snow has drifted to such an extent between Leicester and Northampton as to occasion considerable difficulty and danger. In some parts of the road passages have been cut (sufficiently wide for a coach to pass) where the snow had drifted to the depth of thirty, forty, and in some places fifty feet.

‘At Stroud, near Rochester, at the bottom of the hill, near the milestone, a cottage was com-



pletely buried in snow, and the inmates had to be dug out.

‘*Manchester*.—The principal roads which have thus been rendered for a time nearly or wholly impassable are the roads to Sheffield, by Glossop, and the Woodlands, which is choked up beyond Glossop in the wild district of the Woodlands; the London Road in the south of Warwickshire; also between Ashbourne and Derby (where one of the mails is said to be stopped); and it is also said to be impassable a short distance south of Leicester, where some coaches are stated to be detained. Seventeen coaches (and it is probable that the “Estafette,” and eight fast coaches running between this town and the metropolis, are of the number) are stated to have stuck fast at or near Dunchurch, which is about a stage south of Coventry. The road between this town and Leeds, and that between here and Birmingham, are free from any considerable obstruction; but we understand that in consequence of the stoppage near Dunchurch becoming known at Birmingham, the proprietors of the coaches running between that town and the metropolis determined not to run their coaches.

‘*Bristol*.—A very heavy fall of snow, accompanied by most violent gusts of wind, took place on Saturday and Sunday last, which had the effect of obstructing and rendering impassable the road

betwixt this city and London. On Marlborough Downs and neighbourhood the drift had accumulated the snow fourteen feet in depth in some places, and it became necessary to remove it by manual labour to the extent of four miles.

‘There has been no fall equal to the present since 1806, when the unfortunate Neville was frozen to death ; but the atmosphere had not been particularly cold.’

The mails proceeded on their several journeys from time to time as passages were cut through the snow and they could get on, and consequently some of the horses and harness, which, under ordinary circumstances, were only turned out in the dead of night, had to appear in daylight, much to the disgust of the coachmen and astonishment of the proprietors. On one of the Western mails a proprietor was so surprised and ashamed on seeing the harness on his horses that he immediately went to a local harness-maker and ordered a new set at the rate of four pounds a horse—cheap enough, but not so cheap as a leader belonging to a man who horsed the mail for two or three stages, but who did it so badly that he had notice to take his horses off. They were sold by auction, and one of the leaders sold for—one sovereign !



CHAPTER XVI.

COACHMEN AND GUARDS IN THE  
OLDEN TIMES



## CHAPTER XVI.

ANTERIOR to railways, everyone, were he of royal blood, peer, commoner, plebeian, tramp, or vagrant, having occasion to go from one place to another, was bound to go by the road. The modes of progression were various, including the small cart drawn by one or more dogs with a lazy, hulking vagabond riding on it. Happily, however, for the canine species, this mode of travelling was abolished some years since by Act of Parliament, which prohibited dogs from being used for the purposes of draught.

Of the persons principally responsible for the safe conveyance of the public and their luggage, were the coachmen and guards of the mails and coaches. Of the numerous coachmen I have seen and travelled with I remember two only with any speciality attaching to them. One was a left-handed man, and the other a one-legged man.

I was travelling one night by a coach and on the box-seat, when we came to a change of coach-

men on 'the middle ground.' To my surprise I was asked to change over, when I got up, and then found that the coachman was a left-handed man, and accordingly sat on the near side with his reins in his right hand and whip in his left, leaning right across my face as I sat in the regular coachman's place. I daresay he might have been a very good coachman, but there was no occasion for him to exhibit any extraordinary skill or ability. It looked very awkward. I felt very uncomfortable, and was heartily glad when he left for the lower ground man to take his place.

The one-legged man was right-handed, and drove a day-coach, and to supply his deficiency had a wooden leg, but throughout the year his defect was delicately concealed by the apron in winter and a light cloth wrapper in summer. He was wondrously clever in getting up and down, somehow or other managing to pitch the point of his wooden leg on a step, or something from which it couldn't slip, and he whipped up and down, on and off his box, with considerable quickness and dexterity; but I never heard whether he played in a cricket match between the one arms and one legs.

The regular coachmen were a race *sui generis*, and do not exist now. Their occupation ceased all at once, and they seemed to disappear almost, and drop down like a stone in the water. Many of

them possessed little capability for entering into other occupations totally unconnected with those in which all their lives had been spent, without any anticipation that all their skill and science, acquired after many years of hard and laborious work, would at once be rendered utterly useless. The transition from road to railway travelling was so sudden—much more so than those who do not actually remember the period are aware of. Men whose business, capital, and connection was attached to the road found that everything was at once taken away from them, and they were naturally unable to travel immediately out of their groove, and ruin in many cases was the result. After the coaches ceased running out of London you might occasionally recognise the face of an old coachman driving a 'bus.

The position of a coachman on a fast, well-conducted coach was a lucrative one. Such a coach would load well, and the faster it travelled the more it was patronised, and the better it paid, if not the proprietors, the coachmen, as a coach might be encountering a strong opposition, entailing considerable wear and tear of stock, and running, perhaps, at low fares, but still carrying a good many passengers of a class who were by no means niggardly in their tips to the coachmen and guards.



As a rule, day-coaches travelling about a hundred miles out of London did not carry guards except on the Birmingham road, where I do not recollect a single coach that travelled without one; but the day-coaches to Norwich, Yarmouth, Southampton, Weymouth, and Bristol or Dover, travelled without them. On coaches running longer distances, where great expedition was necessary to enable them to get through the journey in the day, such as to Manchester, Shrewsbury, Exeter, Taunton, Hereford, and Monmouth, a guard was indispensable to assist at the changes, attend to the passengers, luggage, and parcel business, as well as to skid and unskid the wheel through a hilly country, where much time would have been lost if the coachman had to get up and down every time. The present break was not in use in the old coaching days; there was, however, Tongue's patent drag, but it was inconvenient for the coachman to work when perhaps he wanted both his hands to use otherwise. The only coach out of London that adopted it was, I think, the Weymouth 'Magnet.'

On the mails the coachman, in addition to having to assist the horsekeepers in changing, had to manage all his waybill and parcels business, no part of this duty devolving on the mail guard, whose duties, as defined by the Postmaster-General,

consisted in taking up and delivering the mailbags, and, if not engaged in this, to assist the coachman and horsekeeper at the different changes in putting to.

A mail or stage coachman did not occupy a position to which any promotion was attached, but they were sometimes part proprietors, and horsed a few stages. A mail guard, however, might be promoted to an inspectorship, which was an advantage in a pecuniary point, and attended with less labour. An inspector's salary varied at different amounts up to 100*l.* a year, with 15*s.* a day for expenses when travelling. He was selected from among the mail guards, and his duties were responsible. He had to exercise a strict surveillance over the coachmen and guards in his district, report any shortcomings in the performance of their duties, proceed to any place where an accident or irregularity had occurred, and investigate the circumstances attending it, get contracts executed by the several parties along the road when necessary, and generally see that the mails in his district were worked with punctuality and despatch. For these services there were some eight or ten inspectors employed in England, and the number of guards in England and Scotland was 268, nearly all of whom received half-a-guinea a week and their uniform, but no other emoluments from

the Post Office, the rest of their income arising from gratuities received from the passengers.

The position of the mail guard when on duty was very different in some respects from that of the guard on a night-coach, but, balancing one against the other, I think the former had the best of it. He was almost in a state of solitary confinement throughout the night, the luggage and letter bags on the roof almost preventing his holding any conversation with the passengers or coachman in front, but I have sometimes stood up and had a pleasant chat with him. He had not the umbrellas poking against his hat on a wet night and dripping down his neck; and over a fifty or sixty minutes' stage he could get a snooze in his seat, which was by no means an uncomfortable one, and he might rely on it, when they came near to the change, the 'pike,' or anything was in the way ahead, that he would be woke up by the coachman singing out, 'Blow up, Charley!' 'Blow for the change!' or 'Wake 'em up, Charley.'

Knowing the weather he had to encounter, and being inured to it by constant use, I don't think the mail or coach guard underwent any serious amount of physical suffering in the execution of his duties ordinarily, extraordinary snowstorms excepted.

The coach guard, with his six or seven passengers behind, three on the seat with himself, and

four opposite, was not likely to lack conversation if disposed for it, which every man was not, as I once experienced.

Travelling up from Dover by Fagg's coach (of the 'Bell and Crown,' Holborn, now 'Ridler's Hotel'), one night, and there being no one behind with the guard, I got up with him at one of the changes, to have a chat about road matters, and do a little of the horn blowing. I found him, however, so unsociable and so unapproachable, that, when he changed horses again, I returned to my seat on the box, and on communicating to the coachman the futile efforts I had made, he said, 'Yes, sir, he is a very separate man.'

If the mail guard was free from the annoyance of the abominable umbrella, with the coach guard it was *plus aliter* 'more t'other,' for he had an umbrella by the side of him, and one or more opposite, to stream down upon him. For such contingencies, however, he, as most other habitual travellers, was prepared, and, like the eels being skinned, became used to it.

The hardest time for the mail guards, and certainly it was a most severe trial, requiring the greatest pluck, nerve, and endurance, was when the snow was very deep in drifts, and they had to take a pair of the horses off the mail when it was stuck fast in the snow, ride one, and with the letter

bags piled on the other, endeavour by some means to drag them along the road or across the fields, to get through the country, and they performed some wonderful feats in this way.

If the mail guard's was a responsible position, so was also that of the mail or stage coachman driving on a dark or foggy night, the latter by far the worst, as the lamps could not give much help. With strange horses put in, and every conceivable sort of brutes, required a man to be a coachman in reality to keep time at the pace they used to go throughout a man's journey of fifty or sixty miles. Many a man who could drive a light day-coach very fairly was not up to the mark, or, as the phrase is, was nowhere when put on to a heavily-loaded night-coach or mail. There were coachmen in those days whom I may venture to say you could not match now. The great experience they had of all sorts of weather, roads, and horses, and the number of miles they travelled daily or nightly, gave them such practical teaching as is not to be had in the present day.

For teaching a man to drive and making a coachman of him there was nothing like putting him on to night-work. There was then no pottering about and looking down into his hand at his reins or after the end of his thong when he wanted to pick it up again after hitting a leader, the pro-





bability, or almost inevitable result, being that while thus occupying himself he would get into the ditch, run into something on the road or against 'the gate' if he chanced to be near one. If he wished to avoid such *contretemps* it behoved him to have his eyes at all times well over his leaders' heads, so that he might see as quickly as possible anything (it might be a horse or donkey lying down in the road) requiring him to pull up or on one side suddenly. A man working at night thus became used to depending on his hands and feeling his horses' mouths, and with anyone on the box by his side to tell him when he was going out of the straight line, or it was necessary to diverge to one side or the other, could, I believe, have almost driven blindfold.

I have noticed the strong contrast to this when I have seen a man fiddling about with his reins and looking down at his hand to see if he had got them all right, and have wondered what he would have done on a dark night on a mail or coach. As an instance of the necessity of keeping a good lookout ahead I may mention the following occurrence. I was driving on a moonlight night or morning, at all events sufficiently light to be without lamps: the coach was full inside and out, and we were going down a long fall of ground at a good swinging trot, the coachman, an experienced hand, sitting



beside me. I saw something ahead, but neither of us could make out whether it was coming or going, so with a view of being right, if we were meeting it, I pulled to the near side. When too late to pull up, I saw what it was, and went as near to the ditch as I could without going into it, which would certainly have brought us to grief and an inevitable upset. My off-leader's head struck against that of a horse in a cart; it staggered mine a bit, but we were by. I and my box companion looked at each other. Now to describe what it was in the road as I saw it on passing. A cart loaded with straw, which nearly covered the shaft-horse, was standing across the road, with the front horse about half his length in advance of the shaft-horse; the driver I suppose was asleep on the top of the straw, and his horses had stopped across the hill in going up.

Another somewhat similar instance happened when I was riding on a coach in the neighbourhood of Fairford or Cirencester, and shows the necessity of a coachman always, as I have said, keeping a good look-out ahead of his leaders. We were pressed for time to catch the train that the coach met; it was getting rather dusk, and we had no lamps. At a curve of the road there was a double turnpike gate; one was shut, the other open, for which our coachman was making at a





good pace. When too late to pull up, he saw a carriage coming with a pair of horses close to the gate, and they must, I think, have been hidden from him by the turnpike house. To go straight on would have smashed up the jolly postboy with his horses and carriage; the only alternative was to make for the other gate. With a quickness and dexterity which showed his nerve, and that he was equal to the occasion, the coachman pulled on one side, and unavoidably charged the gate with his pole, first getting his leaders aside in time. They came, however, what I may describe as a pretty good buster against the gate, which, I presume, was not fastened, as it flew open and dropped on the ground; the leaders tripped a bit, but by some means got on, while one of the wheelers and the two off wheels, I believe, went over the prostrate gate. Before there was time to stop we had passed. The whole thing took much less time to do than writing this account of it, and had I not been an eyewitness of the occurrence, should hardly have thought it possible.

A slight calculation will show how quickly the number of miles mount up, and what an almost incredible number of miles some of the old coachmen must have driven.

I knew a man who drove the Bath mail from London to Newbury, or *vice versa*, every night,

including Sundays, for six years, having some years previously driven on other roads, and also afterwards.

The following figures will give the number of miles he drove the mail only :—

Nights in the year . . . . .	365
Number of miles each night . . . .	56
Number of miles in a year . . . . .	20,440
Total for the six years . . . . .	122,640

He never, I believe, had an accident, except from a leader's rein breaking, but I suppose from good coachmanship no serious result ensued. How many years he was on the road altogether I do not know.

I was once told by an old coachman, many years on night mails and coaches, that in the course of his life he had driven over eight donkeys—all, I believe, lying out on the roads in the night.

By way of showing her loyalty, Mrs. Ann Nelson, of the 'Bull Inn,' Aldgate, on the day of the Coronation, procured from her coach builder, Gower, of Stratford, a newly-painted yellow coach without any lettering on it, had four grey horses put into it, and driven by her son George, who used to drive the Exeter 'Defiance,' which was one of her coaches. She engaged about ten guards, some in her own service and some of her son Robert, who kept the 'Belle Sauvage,' on Ludgate Hill, all

of them being selected as good bugle-players. They were dressed in red coats and white hats, so that the whole turn-out had a very spicy appearance. It started from the 'Bull' about six in the evening, and called at most of the principal coach offices and at some of the Clubs, where refreshments were sent out to them. They were out all night, and got back in time for some of them to go out with their coaches in the morning, and others, whose day it was to rest in town, to turn into bed and get up again in time to go out with their night-coaches. Altogether they had a most festive night of it.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### RAILWAY AND COACHING PUNCTUALITY





## CHAPTER XVII.

SINCE the revival of coaching we have heard a good deal about the comparative merits of railways and coaches, and no little to the disparagement of the old coaching system. Although an enthusiastic admirer of coaching as it was in its palmy days, I do not for a moment pretend to dispute the vast advantages of railway over coach travelling, or wish that we should be relegated to the old days ; any one who did so would doubtless be qualified for an inside place in Colney Hatch or Hanwell. The number of travellers has now so vastly increased, that, had they all to be conveyed by coaches, I take it so many would be required that the roads would be quite blocked up with coaches, and almost impassable. Take, for instance, the number of passengers in a single excursion train, and calculate how many coaches would be required to convey them, calculating four inside and twelve out to each coach ; and add to these all the other passengers by the ordinary trains each day, and it

is at once apparent that a good many coaches would have to be provided for the conveyance of all the travellers.

While admitting the great superiority of railway over coach travelling, I cannot refrain from saying a word for my old friend the road, and point out one defect in the railway system, which it has always appeared to me might be easily remedied, and which did not exist in the coaching system ; owing, I believe, in a great measure to the coaching business being conducted by private individuals, whose success depended on their conducting their business in the best manner possible in order to secure the patronage and support of the public. I allude to the question of punctuality in the departure and arrival of coaches as compared with railways, and I think a little consideration will lead to the conclusion that railways are not nearly so punctual in keeping time as the coaches used to be, although the difficulties with which the latter had to contend were much greater than those of the railways. To select any particular line of railway as more unpunctual than another might be deemed invidious, and possibly bring one under the company's lash, but a search of the files of the 'Times,' or some of the other London daily papers, would divulge numerous letters complaining of starting half an hour or more late from a station,

and consequently arriving in London about an hour behind time, having lost time at every station all the way up. Indeed, the punctual arrival of a long train is the exception and not the daily practice, as it ought to be. Why it should be so, or that it is necessary and indispensable, I am by no means convinced. There have been many instances of persons having recourse to legal measures for redress of the loss and inconvenience they have suffered from the non-arrival of trains at the appointed times, and a large proportion of the accidents on railways have arisen from the want of punctuality. Every railway guard carries a time-piece of warming-pan dimensions for the purpose, I presume, of keeping the train to its time according to the time-bills ; but that this article in any way assists in the time of the train being properly kept I have as yet failed to discover. It may enable him to see how much time he is losing on the journey from time to time, and to calculate how much he is likely to be behind at the end of the journey ; but it does not seem that he is in any way checked by an official at each station as to the time of his arrival or departure, or incurs any penalty from neglect to keep time. It was quite otherwise with the mails and coaches—with the mail especially. Each mail guard carried a timepiece provided by the Government, and a time-bill on which was

dated the time the mail started away, and on its arrival at its destination he had to give in his timepiece and bill, accounting for any loss of time, which, if frequent or more than a few minutes, would be pretty sure to bring down a Post Office inspector to inquire into the causes of the delay, the result of which might entail serious consequences on the contractors if arising from any wilful neglect or default on their part, as the mail contracts between the persons who horsed the mails and the Postmaster-General contained a clause fixing a penalty of 500*l.* for any breach of the stipulations contained in them, one of which was duly to keep the time according to the time-bill which was annexed to the contract. I wonder what would have been the result of the various mails arriving at the General Post Office continually half an hour or an hour behind time, instead of driving into the General Post Office yard morning after morning at their time almost to a minute.

To bring the mails in all weathers, and at all seasons of the year, through the country punctually to the appointed time, I consider was a great feat, and speaks volumes for the way in which the contractors conducted their business. The distances travelled, and the time required to get over them, will show that the happening of

any of the numerous casualties to which the journey was exposed, such as horses suddenly falling ill, harness breaking, fresh stones laid down on various parts of the road, bad weather, horses not ready at the change, fogs, or unusually heavy loads, would be amply sufficient to get the mail behind time. The difficulty of picking up lost time was best known to the coachman who had to do it, for, being always timed up to pretty well the top speed of his horses, it was no easy matter to increase the regular pace. It might not appear much for a coachman to lose five or ten minutes over fifty or sixty miles, but if each man had done this it would have resulted in the mail getting into London as the railways do, about half an hour, or considerably more, after its time. With the distances the mails ran, many coachmen were necessarily employed on each journey; in some instances a man might drive down and up in each night, in which case he would probably drive about thirty miles, and back, while if he went down one night and up the next, he would work between fifty and sixty miles each night right off. In a journey from London to York—197 miles—occupying twenty-one hours, from Holyhead, Leeds, Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Devonport, or other places a long distance from London, it is manifest that a minute dropped here and there

would in the end mount up to a considerable space of time. The greatest strictness was therefore necessarily enforced on each proprietor and coachman. The result was little short of miraculous. I never remember an instance of an action being brought against a mail or coach proprietor for want of punctuality, and I believe the instances of complaints on the part of the Postmaster-General were of rare occurrence. Not, however, from any laxity on the part of the Post Office inspectors, whose duty it was to attend to any irregularity immediately; and from what the coachmen would tell you, they were a class of officials by no means inactive. While the Postmaster-General was most vigilant in keeping the mail contractors up to their engagements, he was ever watchful for an opportunity of accelerating any of the mails, and they were constantly having the time shortened if it was found that there was a probability of getting the mail through the country more quickly. As an instance of this, when he found the Bath mail was not travelling so fast as the 'York House,' which was a fast day-coach, he docked off some of their time, arguing that if the coach could do the distance in a certain time the mail could do it; not considering, I suppose, the increased difficulty of travelling on dark, foggy nights, or that there were more

helpers probably at the changes for the day-coach than for the mail. Anyhow, he timed the mail to arrive at Newbury seven minutes to two in the morning, and inasmuch as the time-bill was not dated away from Piccadilly till half-past eight, and sometimes later, Newbury fifty-six miles from London, and there were five changes, it was rather a tight fit. The Bristol was timed even faster, being only allowed eleven hours and three-quarters to do 122 miles with fourteen changes.

After the Bath mail had been frequently accelerated a report reached one of the coachmen on the lower ground that the time was going to be further reduced. As he had found it a difficult matter to keep time previously, he was in rather a stew, and when he got off the mail on the up journey the following dialogue took place between himself and the upper ground man, who was a first-rate coachman, and at that time a quick active young fellow, but as he is still living, though having suffered severely from gout and rheumatism, I forbear mentioning his name.

Lower Ground Coachman: 'I hear there's going to be a meeting and the time is to be reduced; I don't know what we shall do—it's hard work enough to keep time now.'

Upper Ground Coachman: 'Change quick—keep the wheels moving, and don't hang about.'



Remark from person inside who put his head out of the window: 'Very good advice too.'

To the astonishment of both coachmen it was Mr. Chaplin, who horsed the mail out of London.

There seems to me no reason whatever why railways should not be punctual; the only difficulty they have to contend with as regards weather being slipperiness of the rails, which is not nearly so frequent as the lateness of the trains, and cannot therefore be debited with the defective timekeeping. A strong head wind certainly may possibly considerably impede a train, but so it did a coach loaded high up on the roof with luggage and letter bags; and considering the respective motive powers of a train and a coach, the latter would have greater difficulty in overcoming the resistance than the train. With horses there was no turning on additional steam or going down an incline at any pace beyond what the horses could at all events gallop; but with an engine you can—and I believe we very often do, though we don't exactly know it—go at a terrific pace. I have no doubt that in answer to the question why railways cannot keep time, it will be said the time is lost in taking in the passengers and their luggage at the various junctions and large stations on the line; if so, then why not make out the time-bill accordingly. If it requires ten

minutes at the Muddlem Station every day to get the unprotected females, with their canary-bird cages, pet dogs, and hundred-and-one belongings, into the train, take a leaf out of the book of the old coach proprietors on the road, and do as they did, put on your time-bill 'Business five minutes,' or whatever other time may be necessary. In fact, do as they did, make out your time-bill and keep to it; make, as they did, your drivers and guards keep it. We may be told that railway companies use every endeavour to be punctual. I, however, think, with the showman who said that some person had described the monkey as sitting upon the last four inches of his tail, 'but that 'ere is fabulous.'

Among some old coaching pictures hanging in the parlour of an old coachman's hostelry I espied the following, which was duly framed and hung up. It was new to me, but may not be so to some of my readers.

## FRIENDLY ADVICE.

Call frequently.  
 Drink moderately.  
 Pay honourably.

Be good company.  
 Part friendly.  
 Go home quietly.

Let these lines be no man's sorrow, pay to-day and trust  
 to-morrow.

The sentiments seem unexceptionable, and such as Sir Wilfrid Lawson or the Permissive Bill advocates could scarcely find fault with.



CHAPTER XVIII.

POSTING—THE THREE JOLLY POSTBOYS  
WITH THEIR SONG



## CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the days of road travelling there were three modes of what the Quaker called 'vehicular conveyance,' which corresponded in some measure with the first, second, and third class travelling on railways in the present day.

The Duke of This or Sir Somebody That going down to Newmarket or Doncaster, would post down with (most probably) four horses; and in like manner the Marchioness of So-and-so or the Countess of Something-else, with the daughters, would post down in their private travelling carriage with four posters, the lady's-maid and footman being in the rumble. This was the first-class style.

The second comprised all those who, not being sufficiently wealthy to post, travelled by the mails and coaches. The ladies, with the elderly and other gentlemen who did not care to face the inclemency of the weather frequently inseparable from outside coach travelling, would be found

inside the crack day-coaches; the young gentlemen and those who liked to see a little of the horses and coaching being outside; while by the mails would travel inside those to whom time was an object more than the inside fare, and they could more conveniently pass their night inside the mail than devote a whole day to the journey. The fares of the day-coaches, either inside or out, and those of the mails or night-coaches, did not differ very much; the day-coaches were rather higher, but the man who could not spare two days for travelling to and fro could manage to give up two nights' rest in bed in going and returning, getting as much sleep as he could each night in or outside the coach, the mere being out of bed not being of any great consequence. Thus the coaches and mails carried nearly all the public of what are denominated in the present day 'the middle class.' There was, however, a very large body which must not be forgotten, and who neither posted nor travelled by mail or coach in a general way, namely, the commercial travellers, who almost invariably travelled in their own conveyances, and with their own horses—or, if not their own, horses hired for the journey. This completes the second class. One word or two more, though, about the commercial traveller of the 'down-the-road' days. He had a special tariff

of his own, and special privileges attached to his order, at the various inns throughout the kingdom, and his horse was baited and kept at a different rate of charge from the ordinary traveller. The commercial traveller going through the country in his trap is now a *rara avis*, and almost as uncommon as a pair-horse coach. He was one of the road sketches which could seldom now be taken from real life.

The third and last class comprised all those who almost from necessity were obliged to go from one part of the country to another without possessing sufficient means to travel by coaches. To these the only mode available for transit might be the carrier's cart, if only for a short distance ; but if compelled to take a long journey the stage broad-wheeled waggon would probably be their means of conveyance. Some might resort to water conveyance, such as the canal-boat or barge ; but these I do not think were many. A sort of conveyance frequently seen on the road, but, happily, now abolished, although not till some years after coaches were off the road, was what I can only designate as a brutal conveyance—I mean the dog-cart, not the dog-cart of the present day, drawn by a horse, but a box, or small carriage of some sort, on two or four wheels, drawn by one or more dogs. A huge brute of a man would sit up on the top of



one of these boxes, and urge the poor dogs along at a tremendous pace, and you might often see them lying down while harnessed to the cart, panting and exhausted, while the man went into the roadside inn to refresh himself. These travelling nuisances were put down in 1855 by an Act of Parliament prohibiting the use of dogs as animals of draught.

As the posting travellers were looked upon by the post-masters, and indeed in many instances looked upon themselves, as above the coach travellers, so there were many houses on the road distinguished as 'Hotel and Posting House,' or 'Commercial Inn and Coach Office,' no coaches stopping at the former. This was more especially the case with houses on the first or second stage out of London; for instance, at the 'Red Lion,' or the 'Green Man,' at Barnet. No coaches stopped at these—they kept post-horses only. So at the 'Verulam Arms,' St. Albans; Cass's, at Stevenage; the 'Salisbury Arms,' at Hatfield; together with, I think, the 'Rose and Crown,' or 'Crown and Cushion,' at Hounslow, and the 'Bush' at Staines. Lower down the road the posting and coaching business was all carried on at the same house, as at the 'Sugar Loaf,' at Dunstable, the 'White Hart,' at Reigate, and, in fact, all down the road. The difference, however, between the commercial

and the non-commercial inn exists at the present day. At Barnet the two principal posting-houses were the 'Red Lion,' at the top of the hill and London end of the town, and the 'Green Man,' at the other end, just between the junction of the St. Albans and Hatfield roads. From these relative positions the 'Red Lion' had the best chance of getting the change with chaises and carriages travelling from London, and the 'Green Man' the best with those travelling up.

Some sixteen or eighteen pairs of post-horses were kept at the 'Red Lion,' and twenty-six pairs at the 'Green Man,' eight postboys being kept at the 'Red Lion,' and about eleven at the 'Green Man'; and there were in the yards what the postboys used to call cads, who looked after the post-horses, washed the chaises, called up the postboys when wanted at night, and lighted and assisted them at the change. The cads in cases of emergency, if all the regular postboys happened to be out, were mounted and had to ride the stage through, unless they happened to meet a postboy returning with his pair, when they exchanged places, the postboy finishing the stage, while the cad took his horses back home.

For the services of the cads the postboys themselves had to pay them about four shillings a week. The 'Red Lion' postboys rode in yellow

jackets and black hats, and the 'Green Man' boys in blue jackets and white hats. In those days horses were kept ready saddled and harnessed day and night, as gentlemen objecting to sleeping a night on the road would start from town at ten or eleven at night, or having travelled up through the night, would arrive there early in the morning.

It sometimes happened that a passenger who had paid his fare by the coach, from some accident just missed it at starting, when he hired a chaise with directions to the postboy to do his best to overtake it. This he might succeed in accomplishing during the first stage, if the coach had not a long start, but if it had, the probability was that it became necessary to take a fresh pair of posters in order to catch it over the second stage.

I suppose the largest number of pairs of post-horses that ever changed in one day, that is to say, during the twenty-four hours, at one house was at the 'Green Man,' Barnet, when Buckell had it. Seventy-five pairs changed—this included pairs which had come to his own inn, working back again, and all his own working backwards and forwards several journeys. The occasion, if I mistake not, was the fight between Spring and Langham in somebody's park down the north road.

Twenty-five pairs a day was considered about

the average number at his house when posting work was not slack, and with this amount of work the postboys would frequently have to ride about fifty miles a day.

Like the coach-masters, the post-masters were very heavily taxed in one way and another—five guineas for a licence for every post-chaise, and duties payable to Government amounting to nearly a third or fourth of the gross earnings. The charges for posting per mile, like the fares by the coaches, went up and down accordingly as there might be a strong opposition, and this was, in fact, so strong that at one time two rival post-masters in a large way of business reduced their charges so low as to little more than cover the Government duty. This, of course, entailed a loss, and did not continue for long. Strong inducements were held out by the post-masters to the ‘jolly postboys’ to drive to their respective houses, so that they might have the business of posting on to the next stage, and you would not unfrequently find when you told the J.P. to drive to the ‘Pig and Whistle,’ he would turn round in his saddle, and with an evident expression of dissatisfaction on his countenance, reply that the ‘Blue Lion’ was the house they generally drove to, the secret probably being that whenever a postboy went to the ‘Blue Lion’ he got a hot dinner ‘free gratis for

nothing,' as a *douceur* for taking the posting job to that inn, whereas the proprietor of the 'Pig and Whistle' did not act in an equally liberal manner.

I should say that the spirit displayed by coach proprietors and post-masters in carrying on their business against any interlopers, and, indeed, against each other, far surpassed the opposition in any other trade or business. They would run coaches at a loss and reduce their fares to a ruinously low figure rather than allow a fresh coach to be put on the road; and so with the posting, they would leave no stone unturned to get the posting business to their houses rather than see the carriages and chaises driven up to and change at a rival establishment. One can imagine it was not very pleasant for the landlord of the 'Golden Fleece,' with a postboy or two standing ready for the next 'turn out,' to see a carriage change at the 'Crown' just above, and 'the grinning postboy' ride past with the fresh pair for the next stage. When persons travelled by post-chaise for any distance, such as sixty or seventy miles or more, the post-chaise as well as the horses were changed at each inn, the post-master at the inn in every town keeping his own post-chaises; and this necessitated the changing of the luggage, the only place for which with a post-

chaise was on the flat square board over the axle of the front wheels, on to which the portmanteaus and other articles were secured by straps.

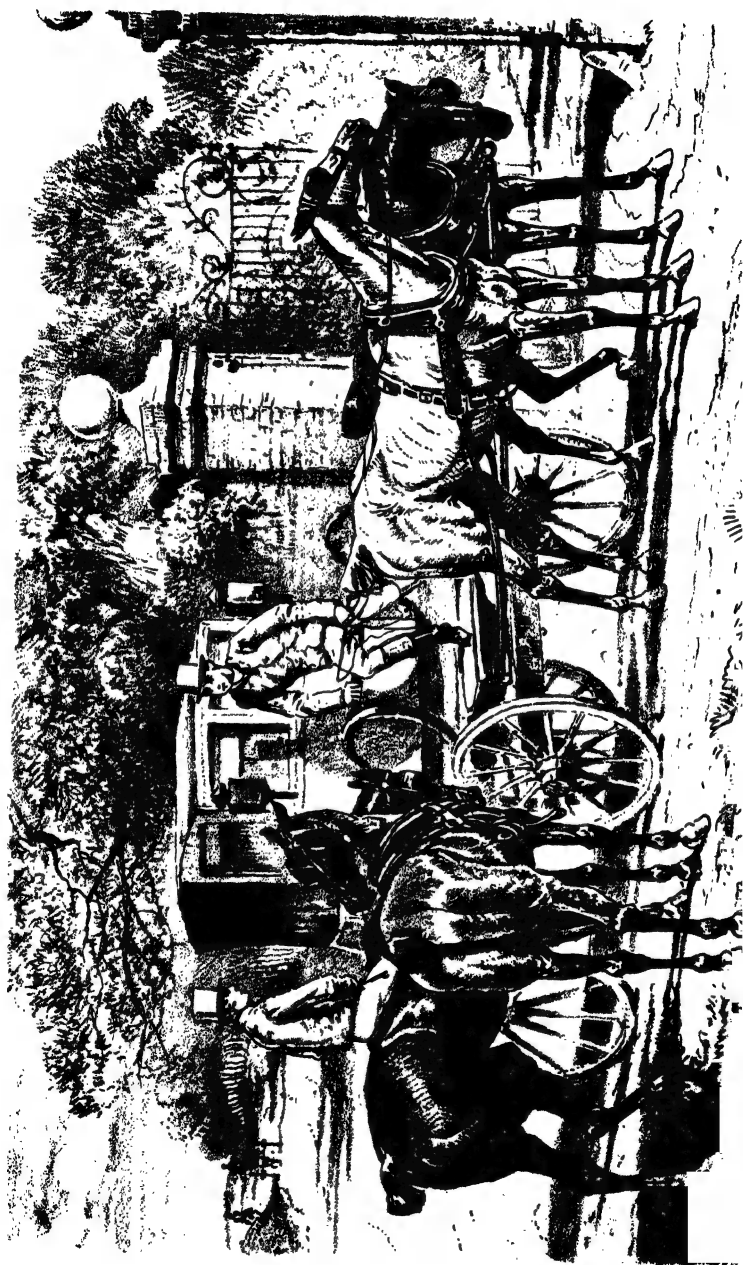
It may seem rather simple to those who have travelled by post-chaises in the old road days to give a detailed description of that which to them is very well known, and is very like giving a description of a railway train, with the appearance of which every one in the present day is perfectly familiar, but it must be remembered that I am writing on bygone times, and of things which cannot now be seen. There are a great many rather beyond what one would call young men, who have never travelled in or even seen the good, downright, genuine old post-chaise and postboy of the olden time, and for such a picture of the mode in which their governors, to use the phrase of the period, travelled, may not be wholly devoid of interest.

At the posting houses four horses were allotted to each postboy, so that at an inn where there were six postboys there would be twenty-four, or, allowing for rest and sick horses, about thirty kept.

If a postboy went out with a chaise and pair in the morning, he would have a fresh pair to go another stage in the afternoon, supposing his turn to go out came round again, as they always went out in rotation. Supposing a job came up with

four horses, two boys would go, each with one of their pairs, and in case any travellers came up when all the boys were out on the road, but there were horses still left in the stables, some one was pressed into the service, and any fellow who might be loafing about the yard and could ride was put up into the saddle, and if he chanced to meet one of the regular postboys returning with a pair, they would change places.

The general aspect of the 'jolly postboy' when he turned out with his chaise and fresh horses was smart and lively, but his return looked somewhat different. I can scarcely designate it funereal, scarcely perhaps melancholy, but it lacked the sprightliness and vivacity of his outward journey. His *modus eundi et redeundi* were totally diverse, for he started as a postboy riding in the saddle, but ere he returned he was 'called to the bar' and drove home. But here, to render myself intelligible to those who have never seen the old post-chaise, I must endeavour to describe it, and how and where the J.P. rode, especially as there was no coach-box of any sort. The post-chaise was hung on C springs, with leather braces, similar to those of a London barouche or chariot, and had a window on each side and in front like a railway *coupé*, and had also one seat only for two persons. From the top of one of the front springs, across to the opposite







one, was a bar somewhat resembling in shape a milkman's yoke, but not nearly so large in the centre—in fact, about three or four inches was the extremewidth of it—and being slightly curved out, it made a sort of place against which a person might rest, but could scarcely be said to sit upon. The feet rested on the flat board which was the depository of the luggage of the travellers in the chaise, and on this board was a small ledge of wood, just sufficient to prevent the feet of the J.P. from slipping forward over the splinter bar, and himself from disappearing under the legs of the horses.

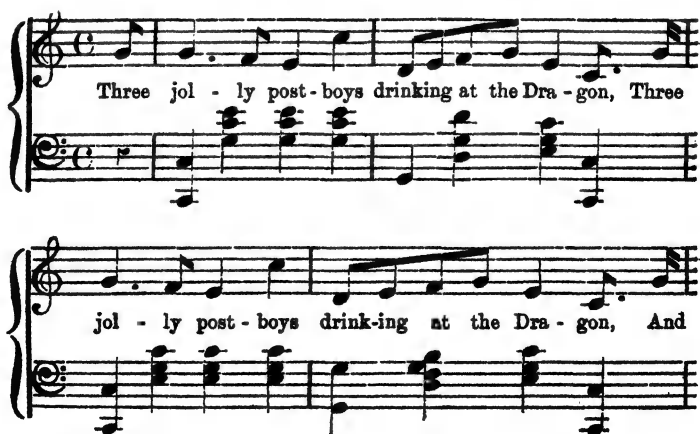
On this bar, then, the postboy sat driving his horses back with the empty chaise. He sat there in his short jacket, with his still shorter whip, and his riding horse with the empty saddle on, but nobody riding, and going at a jogtrot homewards, and if he could by chance pick up a stray passenger on the way so much the better for him.

I never was present at any festivity of postboys, and incline very much to Sam Weller's opinion, that nobody ever saw a postboy taking his pleasure, or a dead donkey, from which he arrived at the conclusion that when a postboy got tired of this life he took a pair of donkeys and went off to another world to enjoy himself. So far as my own

experience goes, the jolly postboys were either on the road or else on the *qui vive* for the 'first turn out,' and I never saw them, as described in the song, 'drinking at the Dragon.'

I have often heard it sung though, and with considerable effect and a powerful chorus, and the air is perfectly familiar to me, although I do not know the composer, not being any musician myself. I do not think it is by either Rossini or Mozart, and it was in existence before the day of the Christy Minstrels or Nigger melodists. For the benefit of those who may feel disposed to try the song, never having heard it before, and for the benefit of the lovers of the old road who may like to hear it again, here it is:—

*The Three Jolly Postboys.*





## I.

Three jolly postboys drinking at the Dragon,  
 Three jolly postboys drinking at the Dragon,  
 And they determined, and they determined,  
 And they determined to finish out the flagon.

## II.

Punch cures the gout, the colic, and the phtisic,  
 Punch cures the gout, the colic, and the phtisic,  
 And it is allowed to be, and it is allowed to be,  
 And it is allowed to be the very best of physick.

## III.

Landlord fill the bowl till it does flow over,  
 Landlord fill the bowl till it does flow over,  
 For there's not a jolly soul, for there's not a jolly soul,  
 For there's not a jolly soul that goes to bed sober.

## IV.

He that drinks and goes to bed sober,  
 He that drinks and goes to bed sober,  
 Falls as the leaves fall, falls as the leaves fall,  
 Falls as the leaves fall, and dies in October.

## V.

He that drinks and goes to bed mellow,  
 He that drinks and goes to bed mellow,  
 Lives as he ought to live, lives as he ought to live,  
 Lives as he ought to live, and dies a jolly fellow.

Post-masters contributed considerably towards the revenue by the large sums they paid for licences and assessed taxes.

	£
The assessed taxes in one year on carriages let with post-horses amounted to. . . . .	36,800
The post-horse duty to . . . . .	231,000
Licences to post-masters . . . . .	350
Making a total of . . . . .	<u>268,150</u>

There was also a further large sum paid annually to Government, principally by the post-masters, although in their capacity rather of coach proprietors, the duties attaching to stage coaches amounting to about 513,000*l.* a year; this included the duty payable on coachmen and guards, stage coach licences, and mileage. Of course they contributed very largely as innkeepers also to the national exchequer, by the various exciseable commodities consumed at their establishments.

Just at the time when the coaching and posting went off the road or was in a state of transition, the change from road to railway travelling for two or three years or more entailed a loss upon the Government. The railway passenger duty being much less, and assessed in a different manner from

the coach and posting duties, and some of what I may call the road duties being lost, the difference between the sums accruing from the two modes of travelling left a considerable deficiency until the facilities afforded by the railway became fully understood, and the prejudice against them (although it may strike some persons in the present day as a strange thing to say) had in some measure abated. There were persons of means, and not a few, who never would travel by rail, and to the time of their death never went on one, but travelled post along the road. Colonel Sibthorp, I think, was one, and Sir John Sebright another.

While the loss to the revenue was considerable, to the unfortunate coach proprietors and postmasters in many cases it amounted almost to ruin. They were left with all their stock-in-trade on hand, and their business entirely annihilated. A large coach proprietor in London lost on one road alone 7,000*l.*; but they were accustomed to losses in the ordinary course of their business before railways abolished them. Coaches were sometimes upset, disease would get into their stables, and horses die from overwork, especially where there was a strong opposition or accidents. So used were they to some of these casualties that they came to look upon them with stoical indifference, as the following instance will illustrate:—A mare

had just been bought by a large coach proprietor for about thirty pounds, to work in a coach which was driven by two men, one up and the other down. One I will call Jack, the other Harry. They were brothers. The mare had been bought to work under Jack, but being somewhat amiss she was given some physic, with strict directions to the horsekeeper not to work her. During this time, however, Harry, coming up with his coach to the change, and finding something the matter with one of his horses, insisted, despite the remonstrances of the horsekeeper, in having the mare put into the coach and working her over the next stage. The result was the mare died, as Jack found on his arrival at the stables with the coach on his up journey. He saw the proprietor a day or two afterwards, when this dialogue ensued :—

Jack : ‘ That’s a bad job about that new mare that was bought the other day.’

Proprietor : ‘ What’s the matter ?’

Jack : ‘ Why, she was somewhat amiss, and had some physic, and I told the horsekeeper not to let her go out of the stable. But Harry came up with the coach ; something was the matter with one of his horses, and he had her out and put into the coach, and she’s dead.’

Proprietor : ‘ Well, Jack, I suppose those that have got ’em must lose ’em ; those that haven’t can’t.’

Memorandum : Horsekeeper got the sack; coachman didn't, being too good a servant to lose.

At a large coaching and posting house down the western road the proprietor had the rules for the conduct of his postboys and management of the yard printed and hung upon a board. They were as follows :—

*Rules and Regulations of this Yard.*

1. Every man shall conduct himself properly. No swearing or quarrelling allowed.

2. That no one shall have a naked candle in his stable, sconces being provided.

3. That each shall be answerable for his own windows, and when he leaves his situation to pay all breakages.

4. That no one shall encourage strangers on the premises.

5. That when the straw or corn comes in each shall immediately attend, take his own proper quantity, and assist with the remainder into the loft.

6. That each shall as quick as possible get the manure from the stable door to the mine, and have his doorway swept clean by ten o'clock every morning.

7. That the sweeper shall have the yard clean



by half-past ten o'clock every morning, and that he keep it so throughout the day.

8. That each shall wheel or throw the manure as far as possible to the back of the mine.

9. That the first and second turn postboy shall be always booted and spurred, with their horses ready harnessed, from eight o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock at night.

10. That the chaise washer shall see that no carriage remains in the open yard all night, whether belonging to his employer or to any other post-master on this road.

11. That no postboy or person engaged in this establishment shall be allowed under any circumstances to wash his horses.

12. That in case of any accident occurring to chaises or horses, the man meeting with such accident shall as soon as possible make the same known to his employers.

13. That every servant in this yard shall at all times, at his own expense, be provided with such tools, &c., as are necessary to fulfil the duties of his situation.

14. That no one shall enter the service of this yard without first giving their assurance that they will comply with these rules and regulations, and by so doing they shall at all times find their employers ready to make their situation comfortable,

and promoting their different stations as an opportunity may occur.

A fine of sixpence shall be paid for every neglect of the above regulations into the hands of the head ostler, which money shall be appropriated towards assisting indigent and sick servants of this yard who may be unable to work.

A place for everything, and everything in its place.

Waste not, want not.



**CHAPTER XIX.**

**COACHING ODDS AND ENDS**



## CHAPTER XIX.

‘LET her go, let her go, Bill!’ ‘Give her her head, I’ve got hold of her!’ or some such words of command from the coachman to the horse-keeper you would hear at almost any stage where there was a rum team to start, or some vicious, restive, ungovernable mare. Ungovernable, perhaps, is an expression I should not use, for I believe of all the animals, however restive and vicious they might be, that were put into coaches, none eventually mastered the coachman. It frequently happened that one who might be somewhat deficient in nerve or skill would make such complaints, and grumble so much about many of his horses, making it perhaps a pretext for not keeping time, that he got them shifted into some other coach, and they came into the hands of a man whom no animal could beat. I have often heard men whom I knew to be first-rate workmen complain in a somewhat dissatisfied tone that, as soon

as they got a horse to steady-down at his work and go quietly, it was taken away to put into some other coach, and some other unruly successor substituted in his place, only to go through the same process. Such a course was no doubt complimentary to the coachman, as showing the proprietor's confidence in his skill and abilities, but the compliment was not always appreciated, and would readily have been dispensed with altogether, with all the trouble of the unruly customers. A quiet start was a thing I never cared much about; what I used to enjoy was a good lively one, when they would be all up in a heap on each other's backs, so to speak, one bolting, another rearing, another throwing herself down, while the fourth might give general rat-tats by some hard kicks against the front boot, as many coaches could testify by the marks of the hind shoes strongly dented into the boot.

I have referred principally to the feminine gender in the above remarks, as I believe, in nine cases out of ten, if there was a restive, vicious animal in the team, it turned out to be a mare, verifying the saying of the Irish postboy, when the gentleman in the post-chaise complained of the pair :—

Says Paddy, These mares are not ould offenders,  
But you can't place no reliance on feminine ginders.

An unfortunate instance of this occurred to a friend of my own. He was travelling down to Bristol one night by Cooper's coach, and occupied the box-seat. On leaving the 'Cottage,' after supper, the near-wheeler (a mare) took to some of her tricks, and my friend, not being much used to coaching, very foolishly jumped off or tried to get down. Anyhow, the result was that he broke his leg, and was obliged to remain at the 'Cottage' for some weeks, where, I need scarcely say to those who knew Mr. Cooper, he received every comfort and attention he could afford. My friend afterwards told me that as he lay in his bed of a night and heard the coaches arrive and depart, he always knew the night when this mare's turn came to be put into the coach, as he was sure to hear a row and 'sich a gittin' upstairs' at the starting.

There certainly used to be some queer customers put into those coaches. The maxim, and the coachman's motto as received from head-quarters, being 'Keep time,' first-rate workmen were generally employed, and in any inferior hands 'accidents and offences' would have been of frequent occurrence.

Those nights, alas! are gone. I have enjoyed very many of them, and in summer rather preferred night to day travelling. There was a peculiar charm, a *je ne sais quoi* about it. There



was something (to me) most exhilarating in a gallop on a hard road on a moonlight night or at early dawn. Then there was the pull-up at the little roadside public, which opened just before the coach arrived, about four or five in the morning. Some hot coffee was ready, poured out of the spout of the old tin coffee-pot in which it was made. There would be a piece of cold meat and a loaf on the table—a little round one in the bar—for the coachman and guard just to get a snack, or for any of the outside passengers who could eat something in about five minutes. Not that tea or coffee were the only fluids ; there was rum or gin and milk for such as liked it, or almost invariably a glass of good beer for those who preferred it. The moderate sum of sixpence about cleared your score, and you went on your way rejoicing and refreshed. Nearly all the little roadside publics prided themselves on some speciality. The pride of one would be beer, another a piece of home-made bacon, while a third might rejoice in a first-rate specimen of some locally manufactured cheese, pork pies, or sausages.

Those who have never tried it have no idea how comfortably you may travel and sleep at night on the box of a coach. I do not hesitate to say as comfortably as in an arm-chair, first, however, turning your cushion up endways on

your left side. This forms the left arm of your chair, while you are sufficiently low in the seat for the rail behind to make you a back. The high seat on the box affords you an arm-rest on the right, while you are low enough down to be out of the way of the coachman's arm. If your head bobs a little while you are asleep, the slope of the footboard has the effect of slightly inclining you backwards, and to fall off is next to an impossibility. *Experientia docet*. I have passed hours, and had many a refreshing snooze in this position.

When you had to travel a distance occupying a period of ten or twelve hours each way, and time was an object, travelling at night was frequently a necessity, and I would much rather travel twelve hours outside a good coach than have to sit the same time in weariness and monotony in a first-class carriage on a railway. Perhaps at the present day one is not quite so hardy and inured to rough weather as in the days of road-travelling. Anyhow, it is many years since (dating as far back as the time when long coaches stopped) I have had the rain running off the brim of my hat for some twelve or thirteen hours consecutively. Very few hats of the present day, except special 'rough-weather' hats made for shooting or hunting, would, I expect, stand what our old beavers were called upon to go through. They were heavier considerably than

the modern tile; but they stood a deal of wear. I always found a good five-and-twenty-shilling beaver would last as a best for nearly a year, and then, like a horse out of a swell day-coach, have a good deal of work left in it. The contempt with which the hats which superseded the beaver were greeted on their introduction I well recollect. Various opprobrious epithets were applied to them — ‘silk ’ats,’ ‘gosses,’ ‘four-and-nines,’ &c., alluding to the price paid for them.

In many respects the down-the-road costume was a thing that used to attract a good deal of my notice, not to say, at times, admiration. A well-made man, with his coaching clothes well cut and fitting neatly, seemed to harmonise with the coach and the whole turn-out, being, however, quite different from a low horsey get-up, which to my mind is a thing to be utterly abhorred. A very favourite style of coat, especially with the guards, was a green with brass buttons, and occasionally coachmen wore top-boots; but with the guards, who frequently were up and down and could not have an apron like the coachman, other means of keeping their legs dry and warm were adopted. Boots reaching up to the knees, with long thick worsted stockings coming up over the thighs, these, with cloth leggings over them, would stand a good deal. Railway rugs were then not introduced,

and we kept ourselves warm as best we could. We certainly had not the luxuries of the first-class carriage in the railway, with foot-warmers, and doubtless should feel the turning out for a night on a coach much more than we used to when it came almost as a matter of course, and we were better prepared with the requisite toggery than we might be now. I have ridden many hundreds of miles outside coaches, but I don't think I ever rode twelve miles in one at a time. The greatest annoyance you could have outside a coach, was to have a woman behind you when on the box, with an umbrella up on a regular wet day. First of all she would poke it against the back of your hat and nearly shove it off; then, by way of a change, catch hold of the brim with one of the points and almost pull it off the back of your head; and lastly, by way of variety, shove it just below your hat so adroitly as to send a little stream down the back of your neck before you were aware of what was coming.

Another not very comfortable state of things was to occupy an end seat at night next to some one who went to sleep and continually kept lurching up against you. With these little drawbacks, however, the journeys were enjoyable, and I suppose we were inured to them. I never knew of more than one instance of a man falling

off a coach. It was this: I was on the box of a coach coming over Beckhampton Downs one moonlight night. The coach was full in front, with a good load of luggage on the roof, and both seats at the back were, I believe, filled with Jack Tars on their way up from Bristol. Suddenly there was a cry from the back of 'Man overboard!' The coachman pulled up immediately, and on looking back I could see a heap of something a short distance off, down in the middle of the road. I got down at once, but by the time I was down all the tars were also off the coach. We ran back to the spot, where we found a tar, in the usual blue suit, lying flat on his back. His mates got him up and carried him to the coach, and put him upon it, when we went on again, and he was, I believe, among the others who turned up three or four hours afterwards at the first little public we found open, and was on the spot when glasses of rum were going round with his mates. I don't know that he sustained any injury, and probably as he went over the back of the coach he caught hold of the iron or something that broke his fall.

Those sailors would travel all night without so much as a great-coat amongst the lot—fellows who looked as if they had just come over from the West Indies, with their necks all bare, and a wisp

of black tie on, just as you may see them about the docks in London.

On starting they usually had one or more stone jars with them—whether containing spirits or beer I know not—but they always had taken a pretty good allowance of some fluid on board before getting on to the coach, and were very jolly.

The next morning, however, about four or five, they would get down shivering, and with teeth chattering like monkeys, and endeavour to warm themselves up with spirits. They did not believe in the effect of a glass of good beer, or a cup of tea or coffee, but strictly adhered to the plan of the sailor, who, being allowed three wishes, and three only, said, ‘Rum, ’bacca’; then, after considerable deliberation, ‘More rum.’

Reverting to the varieties of dress that used to be worn by coachmen, I remember one—and one only—who used to wear drab breeches, and gaiters of the same colour, up to his knees, like a groom’s undress. He was a little old man, with hair perfectly white, and generally venerable appearance, and drove the ‘Old Salisbury’—a night-coach—from London to that place, a six-insider, starting from the ‘Bell and Crown,’ Holborn.

He left there about six in the evening; but,

I should guess, could not have got much more than twenty or thirty miles when the 'Quicksilver' mail would bowl past him. He had a good long stage to begin with, his first change being at Mr. Fagg's house, between Hounslow and Bedfont, somewhere about thirteen or fourteen miles I should say from the 'Bell and Crown.' Six-insiders, however, never went very fast, but partook more of the 'creepy-crawly' style. Two other coaches, both carrying six in, also went from the 'Bell and Crown'—one a night-coach to Southampton, the other, the 'Traveller,' to Exeter. The Southampton and Poole mail also went from the same inn; and, lastly, a fast day-coach to Taunton called the 'Swiftsure'—horsed one day out of London by Sherman from the 'Bull and Mouth,' and the other by Fagg from the 'Bell and Crown,' Holborn.

This, like many other of the old coaching inns, has been transmogrified, the entrance to the yard having been thrown into the hotel. The 'Bull and Mouth' has been similarly treated, and is now the 'Queen's Hotel.' The 'Swan with Two Necks' is converted into a railway goods station; the 'Spread Eagle,' Gracechurch Street, into a fine building of counting-houses and offices; the 'George and Blue Boar,' Holborn, is now the 'Inns of Court Hotel;' the 'Belle Sauvage,' a pile of

warehouses and places of business: while, going down the road, we find the 'Castle' at Salt Hill<sup>1</sup> a large school, and the inn of the same name at Marlborough is now the site of Marlborough College; and the large hotel at St. Albans, known as the 'Verulam Arms Posting House,' is a private dwelling-house; the drive up to it, where the post-chaises formerly went, being enclosed; and a church built on the ground that was part of the land attached to the stabling.

Such are a few of the changes that have taken place in the time of old stagers.

<sup>1</sup> Burnt down on the night of April 19-20, 1882.





**CHAPTER XX.**

**THE LAST STAGE IN**



## CHAPTER XX.

As in coaching days there was an end of the journey, and the last stage in, so I have now come to the end of my journey, and it only remains for me to work over the last stage. Our journeys used to be performed under a variety of circumstances, rendering them pleasant or unpleasant, such as we wished to have again, and such as we devoutly wished we might never have to go over again. They might be by night or by day, in summer or winter, on dark, bitterly cold nights, in snow or drenching rain, or on summer nights, when, in fact, you might say there was scarcely any night at all; on bright frosty days in winter when the hoofs of the horses rattled again on the hard dry ground, or in the blazing sun of a summer day when the irons of the coach were so hot you could scarcely bear your hand on them. Such were some of the vicissitudes met with by the constant traveller by coach. I have gone through them all, and more than once. Some of

them I certainly should not now feel inclined (if the opportunity offered) to go through again.

The luxurious travelling in the railway carriage, where the state of the weather outside matters little, has for so many years accustomed us to this mode of locomotion, that I expect there are a good many of the old stagers who used to think nothing of turning out for a long journey by coach, whatever might be the time or weather, but would now shrink from the undertaking. But I suppose use is second nature, and, like the eels being skinned, it was nothing when we were used to it.

I have frequently heard young men, who have perhaps never been on a coach in their lives, or ever seen a regular stage coach of the olden time, with its load of passengers and luggage, exclaim when looking at coaching pictures or hearing a description of a journey by coach, 'What a horrid thing it must have been travelling by those coaches!' or, 'I wonder how in the world people could ever travel in that way;' or again, 'Fancy being four-and-twenty hours going from A to B, where you now go in about five or six.'

That you often reached your journey's end very tired and wearied, in fact were in that condition before you got to the last stage in, undoubtedly was the case. So perhaps some of my

readers, before they have come to their journey's end, and reached this last stage in, may have become tired and wearied (though I hope not). If so, and they are young, I would remind them that they are only going through what their fathers and grandfathers have done before them.

I trust that in travelling down the road my readers may have found some stages that have been enjoyable, if others have not been quite so, and that they may have picked up some scraps of useful information connected with road matters.

It now only remains for me to throw down the reins and the whip, and take my leave of those who have travelled down the road with me as

AN OLD STAGER.



